DAVIDSON'S THIRD DOGMA

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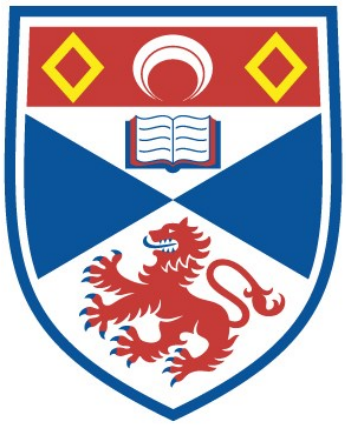

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"Davidson's Third Dogma."

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Preface

Thank you to all who helped me complete my M.Phil. First on the list here must be my supervisor, Dr. Fraser MacBride, whose straightforward way of doing philosophy and seemingly infinite patience benefited me in equal amounts. Others who deserve thanks include practically every postgraduate philosophy student at St. Andrews between 1998 and 2001—with special mentions for Brandon Cooke, Andrew Reisner and Raffaele Rodogno. Also, I would like to express my appreciation to all in the Department of Logic and Metaphysics and the Department of Moral Philosophy for providing such an active and encouraging philosophical community in which to work.

Saving the best till last: thanks to my long suffering parents for supporting and encouraging me, and to Astrid for putting up with Quine and Davidson every day for well over a year.

Chapter 1

1.1. Aims.

The aims of this thesis can be summed up as follows: to outline some of Davidson's arguments *against* empiricism, and some of his arguments *for* a non-empiricist alternative. The arguments against empiricism are those attacking what Davidson calls the third and final dogma of empiricism. These arguments are given in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (henceforth OVICS). The arguments for an alternative to empiricism are taken from "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge".

In more detail the aims are as follows. Firstly, I intend to explain in some detail what the third dogma of empiricism is. Secondly, I hope to give a clear and close reading of Davidson's arguments attacking the dogma, as presented in OVICS. As I read these arguments they in no way presuppose any of Davidson's theses concerning Radical Interpretation and the Principle of Charity. His arguments in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", on the other hand, clearly do presuppose such theses. My third aim is to present the arguments in "A Coherence Theory" as defending an alternative to the empiricism rejected in OVICS, and thus illustrating that the stand-alone arguments against the third dogma compliment the arguments from Radical Interpretation offering an alternative to dogmatic empiricism. My final aim, however, is not so supportive of Davidson's project as the others. In chapter 3 I will present a problem for Davidson's arguments in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", and so suggest that his alternative to empiricism is no better off than the empiricism he attacks in OVICS.

1.2. A Roadmap.

In this section I will outline how I attempt to meet the aims set in 1.1. This outline will proceed chapter by chapter, and highlight where each aim is supposed to be achieved.

Section 1.3 will go some way to meeting my first aim—i.e. to explain what exactly the third dogma of empiricism is. In OVICS and "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" Davidson's primary target is Quinean empiricism. In 1.3 I try to get clear what sort of empiricism Quine holds, and thus what type of empiricism

Davidson is attacking. To do so, I first explore how Quine's empiricism developed as a reaction to the empiricism of the Logical Positivists. Then I discuss Quine's empiricism in more detail. And finally, I explain what part of Quine's empiricism Davidson finds dogmatic.

Chapter 2 is primarily concerned with aims two and three. Aim two was to give a clear and close reading of Davidson's arguments against the third dogma of empiricism. As I said in 1.1, my reading of OVICS shows that these arguments in no way presuppose any of Davidson's arguments for Radical Interpretation and the Principle of Charity. Rather Davidson argues that there is a contradiction inherent in the scheme-content dualism (which by this point will have been shown to be the third dogma of empiricism (1.3)). Davidson examines and rejects both Kuhnian and Quinean attempts to overcome this contradiction, arguing that both fail. He concludes that since this contradiction cannot be overcome, the scheme-content dualism is unintelligible, and should be rejected as a dogma of empiricism.

In presenting these arguments as independent of Radical Interpretation, the first of two steps has been taken in achieving my third aim—that is, to demonstrate that Davidson's arguments against the third dogma are stand-alone arguments that support his arguments from Radical Interpretation for an alternative to empiricism. The second step in achieving this aim is to be carried out in chapter 3.

In chapter 3, I present Davidson's alternative to what he now considers to be a defunct empiricism. This alternative takes the form of a coherence theory of knowledge which is supported by arguments from Radical Interpretation. In presenting this alternative, it will be clear that it is consistent with (and perhaps even motivated by) Davidson's attack on empiricism in OVICS.

The final sections of chapter 3 (3.3-3.4) will see my fourth and final aim come to fruition, and will bring the thesis to a close. In these sections I will present a problem for Davidson's alternative. I will argue that while the Principle of Charity may make unintelligible the possibility of someone having mostly false beliefs, it does so illegitimately, and thus Davidson does not (in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" at least) have a response to global scepticism—i.e. to the possibility that most of our beliefs might be false.

Now we may return to my first aim—to explain what exactly the third dogma of empiricism is. This is the purpose of the next section.

1.3. The Dogmas of Empiricism.

Logical Analysis.

The members of the Vienna Circle admired the clear and progressive methodologies applied in the empirical sciences. Contemporary philosophical methods pleased them rather less. The contemporary philosophical scene was dominated by neo-Kantian idealism. While Kant himself had rejected the possibility of a supersensible metaphysics, those who followed him were rather more optimistic of the prospects of such a discipline. In severing metaphysics and science, Kant had convinced others that there were new insights to be gained from metaphysics as an independent and self-regulated subject.[1]

The resultant plethora of metaphysical systems, and the lack of any common standards on which to adjudicate between competing metaphysical claims contrasted sharply for the Positivists with the state of the empirical sciences at the time. While metaphysicians seemed incapable of agreeing on method, subject-matter, or criteria of success, scientists had shared standards for assessing the merits of alternative systems. Of course, they still disagreed among themselves over numerous issues, but these disagreements were constructive because of agreement on general issues of methodology. Since metaphysicians often disagreed on such issues, it seemed that they spent much of their time talking past one another.[2]

The Positivists were desirous of a new philosophical method—one that avoided the extravagances of neo-Kantian metaphysics, one with certain 'scientific' qualities. Scientific problems could be clearly formulated in a way acceptable to most scientists, and there was a relatively fixed set of criteria for what was to count as a solution to any particular problem. Philosophy, as the Positivists viewed it, sorely lacked such virtues, and so they attempted to develop a philosophical methodology of comparable merit.

They found suggestive examples in the work of Ernst Mach and Henri Poincaré. However, even more influential was the 'logical atomism' of Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the work of these two philosophers the Positivists found the method of 'logical analysis', which they embraced and attempted to develop in line with their empiricism.[3]

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[1]Romanos, *Quine and Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 5-11.

[2]Schlick, "The Turning Point in Philosophy", p. 57, and Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language", pp. 61, 65-7, 69-72, 76-7.

[3]See Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", and "Logical Atomism", and Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

Both Russell and Wittgenstein insisted that the investigation of logic should be central to philosophical work.[4] Moreover, Russell believed that logic had *always* been central to philosophy, even though many philosophers were unaware of its influence. He suggests, for example, that the subject-predicate form embraced by logicians since Aristotle had, in part at least, influenced the trend in Western metaphysics to distinguish between substance and attribute.[5] In becoming aware of this influence, along with developing a new logic (that of Peano and Frege), a new method of philosophy was born, the method of logical analysis.[6] This is the method embraced by Russell in his work on philosophy of mathematics (especially in *Principia Mathematica*) and elsewhere, and by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and it is this method that so impressed the Positivists.

The method of logical analysis was first to make philosophers aware of how one might be tricked by language into making fallacious inferences. Following on from this, logical analysis was to suggest how we might improve our language in order to avoid such mistakes altogether. Attempting to improve our logic, with the end goal of using it as a basis for an ideal language, not only aids us in making correct inferences, but can also aid us in learning something of the structure of the world. Russell believed that logic may not only add certainty to our philosophical theories by ensuring that they are formally correct, but also that investigation of logic could itself yield philosophical knowledge. The idea was that a ideally logical language must in some ways mirror the world—more specifically, that the logical structure of this language would mirror the structure of the world.[7] Wittgenstein embraced this method, and uses it to develop a metaphysics of 'facts', 'states of affairs', and 'objects' in the first two sections of the *Tractatus*.[8]

There was much in this method of logical analysis that appealed to the Positivists. Firstly, the investigation of logical form, as demonstrated in the work on mathematics by Frege, Russell and Whitehead, had the 'scientific' qualities the Positivists admired.[9] Vague musing on the "validity and limits of human knowledge ... are replaced by considerations regarding the nature of expression, of representation, i.e. concerning every possible 'language' in the most general sense of the term." There was much agreement on the method and subject matter of these considerations. And, most importantly, "[w]herever there is a meaningful [philosophical] problem one can in theory always give the path that leads to its

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[4]Russell, "Logical Atomism", p.31, 45, 47. See also, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", pp. 178-82, and Schlick, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6.
[5]Russell, "Logical Atomism", pp. 32, 38.
[6]See Schlick, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[7]Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 38.
[8]Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, §§. 1-2.225.
[9]Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

solution". Of course, as in the sciences, "[t]he practical following out of this path may ... be hindered by factual circumstances", but for any properly philosophical problem, solution was possible.[10]

Secondly, the method of logical analysis encouraged close links between philosophy and the sciences.

> It seems to me that science has a much greater likelihood of being true in the main than any philosophy hitherto advanced (I do not, of course, except my own). In science there are many matters about which people are agreed; in philosophy there are none. Therefore, although each proposition in a science may be false, and it is practically certain that there are some that are false, yet we shall be wise to build our philosophy upon science, because the risk of error in philosophy is pretty sure to be greater than in science. If we could hope for certainty in philosophy the matter would be otherwise, but so far as I can see such a hope would be chimerical.
>
> (Russell, "Logical Atomism", p. 46.)

So, logical analysis may serve as a philosophical method that takes science as its subject-matter. Epistemology then becomes science, and philosophy becomes the investigation of the meaning of scientific terms, and the form of scientific language.[11]

Finally, the lack of certainty in philosophy as an autonomous mode of inquiry, expressed in the Russell quote above, was a view that the Positivists had much sympathy for. They would have approved of Russell's claim that "certainty in metaphysics seems to me unattainable", even through the application of his new method.[12] The Positivists were fiercely anti-metaphysical, and the fact that logical analysis did not bring with it any metaphysical baggage was definitely an advantage in their eyes.

Logical Positivism.

Encouraged by the work of Russell and Wittgenstein, the Positivists embraced the method of logical analysis, and made it their own. To demonstrate how this method was applied by the Positivists, in this section I will discuss a representative example, from the heyday of the Vienna Circle. The example I have chosen is that of Carnap, as presented in his "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language", first published in 1932.[13]

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[10]Schlick, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6

[11]For the Positivists' endorsement of this approach see, for example, Schlick, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-7.

[12]Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 50. See also, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", pp. 269-81.

[13]Originally published as "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch Logische Analyse der Sprache", in *Erkenntnis*, Vol. II, 1932. Translated by Arthur Pap in Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, pp. 60-81.

Like Russell and Wittgenstein before him, Carnap investigates logical form in order to gain philosophical insight. He begins by considering what logical or formal characteristics a language must have for it to be meaningful. Once these have been determined, he then draws out some of their philosophical implications. The logical characteristics a meaningful language must possess are summed up by the rules of logical syntax. According to Carnap, investigation of logical syntax (i.e. logical analysis) will give insights into various philosophical issues—e.g. concerning meaning, verification, the methodology of the sciences, and the possibility of non-empirical knowledge. In what follows, I will first detail Carnap's views on logical syntax, and then discuss the resultant philosophical insights.

"A language", Carnap tells us, "consists of a vocabulary and a syntax, i.e. a set of words which have meanings and rules of sentence formation."[14] When we talk about the syntax of a language, we are usually talking about its grammar. Carnap, however, is not concerned with grammar but rather with the *logical* syntax of language. He wishes to investigate not what makes a sentence grammatically well formed, but logically well formed. Such an investigation is to give an understanding of what logical form a language must have in order for it to be meaningful.

A language is more than a mere vocabulary. If we pick words from such a vocabulary and put them together one after another followed by a full-stop, we get a list and not a sentence. Only when words are combined in certain ways do they produce meaningful sentences. How words can be combined in order to produce sentences is stipulated by the syntax of the language. These rules determine what form or structure a list of words must have in order for it to be a meaningful sentence. Without the form imposed by syntax, there would be no languages.[15] Thus, they embody the formal conditions for languagehood. As I have said, for Carnap and the Logical Positivists, these formal conditions were of two basic types—grammatical and logical.

A sentence in language L, say s, in which the words are put together in accordance with the rules of grammar for L is grammatically well formed. The rules usually tell us which (grammatical) types of words can go with which, and in what order. So, to determine whether the construction of s is in accordance with these rules, one must know what the rules are, and also of what grammatical type the words in s are.

Similar reasons make a sentence *logically* well formed. But now the syntax rules are not grammatical, but (unsurprisingly) logical. Just as putting subject, verb and conjunction together in 'Caesar is and' offends against the rules of grammar (for

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[14]Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language", p. 61.
[15]Or else there would be only one-word languages.

English), and so produces a meaningless sentence, putting 'words'[16] of particular logical forms in the wrong order, e.g. singular term and disjunction in 'Caesar or or', offends against the rules of logical syntax (for propositional logic), and so produces a meaningless sentence.[17] For a sentence to have meaning, then, it must not only be grammatically but also *logically* well formed—i.e. it must be constructed by ordering words of a certain logical form in the order stipulated by the rules of logical syntax.

There is, however, a substantial difference between the two types of syntax. While grammar is primarily concerned with the rules for the correct use and combination of words, the rules of logical syntax are to be derived from study of the true subject of logic, i.e. inference. (In his paper Carnap limits his discussion to deductive inference, and I will do likewise.) This being the case, the primary concern of logical syntax is to stipulate rules of *inference*, and then ensure that rules for sentence formation and the logical form of words cohere with the inference rules.

The rules of logical syntax concerning inference are commonly referred to as logical laws. An example of such a law is *modus ponens*—from the two true premises (1) the conditional C and (2) the antecedent of C, the consequent of C follows. In this particular example, the rule tells us what form of conclusion follows from premises of a particular logical form. 'Conditional', 'antecedent', and 'consequent' are all terms for sentences of a particular *logical* form, and the rules for the correct construction of sentences rest on rules of inference like modus ponens. A sentence, then, is logically well-formed if it can feature in a logical inference, and the logical form of a word is also determined by how it features in logical inference.

Thus we arrive at the essential logical characteristics a language must possess in order for it to be meaningful. For a sentence to be logically well-formed is for it to be able to feature in deductions as premise and/or conclusion. And so, the logical characteristic a language must possess for it to be meaningful is that all sentences formed in the language can feature in deductions. To ensure that this is the case, the laws for sentence formation (the laws of logical syntax) must agree with, and derive from, the logical laws.[18] It follows that a word is only meaningful if it can feature in sentences that feature in deductions. That is, it is only meaningful if it has a certain *logical* form or type (e.g. if it is a singular term, predicate, quantifier, etc.). And so we return to the initial truism that a language is made up of a vocabulary and a syntax. Now we have seen that for a language to be meaningful, all the words in its vocabulary must have a logical form or type, and the rules of syntax must be in accord

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[16]When speaking of the logical form of words, I mean the logical form of any logically significant sub-sentential term or phrase.

[17]The sentence 'Caesar or or' is of course grammatically, as well as logically, ill-formed.

[18]The logical laws are then the most basic laws of logical syntax.

with the logical laws and produce only sentences that may feature in logical deductions.

So, the ability of words and sentences to enter into deductive relations fixes their form, and so ensures that they are meaningful (in Carnap's sense of the term[19]). But logical syntax not only gives insight into meaningfulness. According to Carnap, what deductive relations words and sentences enter into also determines their meaning.[20] This is the first of the philosophical insights to be gained by investigation of logical syntax.

The process of determining meaning by investigation of logical syntax is as follows. First, to ascertain the meaning of a word, we must first determine its logical form.

> [T]he *syntax* of the word must be fixed, i.e. the mode of its occurrence in the simplest sentence form in which it is capable of occurring; we call this sentence form its *elementary sentence*. The elementary sentence form for the word "stone" e.g. is "x is a stone"; in sentences of this form some designation from the category of things occupies the place of "x," e.g. "this diamond," "this apple."
>
> (Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics", p. 62.)

Let S be the elementary sentence for a particular word a. Then the question 'what is the meaning of S?' is to be reformulated as 'what sentences is S *deducible* from, and what sentences are deducible from S?'[21] But how is this, a question about logical form, supposed to determine *meaning*? An example is in order.

Take the word 'anthropode'. 'Anthropode' means 'an animal with a segmented body and jointed legs'. Let the elementary sentence S for 'anthropode' be 'x is an anthropode'. Now, the answer to the question 'what sentences is S deducible from, and what sentences are deducible from S?' is: S is deducible from the set of premises 'x is an animal', 'x has a segmented body', and 'x has jointed legs', and each of these three premises are deducible from S. And so the connection between meaning and logical relation becomes clear. The meaning of a word is specified by a definition in terms of other words, or a 'reduction' to other words. The relation of the

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[19]Carnap makes a distinction between what he later calls 'cognitive' and 'expressive' meaning. He will not deny that some sentences that offend against logical syntax have meaning. For example, a poet may use a logically ill-formed sentence discussing an emotion, and this sentence will have meaning. This type of meaning Carnap calls 'expressive' meaning, i.e. it expresses for example an "attitude" or an emotion. But it does not have any 'cognitive' meaning, i.e. it does not assert anything or describe a state of affairs. The fact that the poet expresses rather than asserts will not worry her, for she does not intend her work to be taken as a deductive argument to a true conclusion. A philosopher, on the other hand, should intend her work to be taken this way, and so should be only concerned with cognitive meaning, and the logical form of her language. And so the language of the philosopher should be purged of expressive meaning, and adhere to the rules of logical syntax. *ibid.*, pp. 78-81.

[20]*ibid.*, p. 62.

[21]*ibid.*, p. 62.

word to its 'reduction' is a logical one—i.e. the word a is reducible to the words b_1, b_2, ... b_n if and only if the elementary sentence for a is deducible from the set of elementary sentences for b_1, b_2, ... b_n and each of the elementary sentences for b_1, b_2, ... b_n are deducible from the elementary sentence for a.[22]

Once the form and meaning of the vocabulary of a language have been fixed, the meaning of the sentences of that language will be easily establishable. Knowing the form and meaning of the words that go to make up a sentence, and knowing the rules of logical syntax in accordance with which the sentence has been constructed, we will be able to determine the meaning of the sentence. And just as words are logically reducible to other words, so sentences are logically reducible to other sentences. So, for example, if I wish to know the meaning of

(1) This man is an anthropode.

I may carry out a logical reduction on the sentence, reducing it to

(2) This man is an animal with segmented body and jointed legs.

This reduction follows from the reduction of 'anthropode' mentioned above. We may reduce the sentence further by determining how 'this man' could be reduced. That is, we could construct an elementary sentence for 'this man'—i.e. 'This man is F'—and investigate how it enters into deductive inferences.

Carnap claims that all sentences are in this way reducible to other sentences. And, by this process of reductionism, each sentence can be linked to sentences that are, in some way, about experience ('observation' or 'protocol' sentences).[23] Therefore, the logical process of reduction not only tells us what the meaning of a sentence is, but also what experiences would verify it. (Hence the Positivist slogan "The meaning of a statement consists in its method of verification".[24]) Thus we come to the second philosophical insight to be gained from investigation of logical syntax. This time the investigation of the logical syntax of a language, *L*, will give us an insight into the method of verification for sentences in *L*.

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[22]The example is taken from Carnap, *ibid.*, p. 63.

[23]The Positivists disagreed on how exactly these sentences are 'about' experience. "In the theory of knowledge it is customary to say that the primary sentences refer to 'the given'; but there is no unanimity on the question what it is that is given. At times the position is taken that sentences about the given speak of the simplest qualities of sense and feeling (e.g. 'warm,' 'blue,' 'joy' and so forth); others incline to the view that basic sentences refer to total experiences and similarities between them; a still different view has it that even the basic sentences speak of things", Carnap, *ibid.*, p. 63. See Schlick "The Foundation of Knowledge" and Neurath, "Protocol Sentences" for a classic debate concerning these differences.

[24]Schlick, "Positivism and Realism", pp. 86-95.

If all sentences in *L* can be reduced to observation sentences by logical analysis, and these observation sentences can be directly verified by experience, then we have a method for verifying all sentences in *L*. To verify any particular sentence *s* in *L*, we simply investigate what observation sentences *s* reduces to, and then check whether these observation sentences match our experience or not. The relation of reduction is a logical one, i.e. it is fully determined by the logical syntax of *L*, and therefore the method of verification can be determined purely by logical investigation. Of course, once we know which observation sentences will serve to verify a particular sentence, an empirical investigation must be carried out in order to determine whether or not the observation sentences are supported by experience. But the fact remains that *logical* investigation will yield epistemological insights.

One such insight was that not all knowledge need be justified by experience. While most meaningful sentences were reducible to observation sentences, there were meaningful sentences that were not. Such sentences, referred to by Wittgenstein as 'tautologies' and 'contradictions', are simply true or false in virtue of their logical form.[25] Thus they are true or false 'come what may' in experience.

Following later work by Quine, we may distinguish two types of 'tautologies', or as they were called by the Positivists, 'analytic' sentences.[26] First, there are logical truths. For example,

(1) No unmarried man is married.

Second, there are sentences which are true in virtue of their meaning. For example,

(2) No bachelor is married.

For Carnap and the Positivists, sentences of type (1) are true purely in virtue of the rules of logical syntax. (1) states that a man cannot be both married and unmarried. If the logical syntax of a language in which (1) is stated disallows such simultaneous attribution and non-attribution of predicates to singular terms, then (1) is true in *L* in virtue of the rules of logical syntax for *L*.

(2), as I have said, is taken by the Positivists to be true in virtue of the meaning of 'bachelor' and 'married'. Investigation of the meaning of 'bachelor' will show that it is reducible to the words 'unmarried male'. Therefore, (2) is reducible to

(3) No unmarried male is married.

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[25]See, for example, Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, §§. 4.46-4.4661. "Propositions show what they say: tautologies and contradictions show that they say nothing" (4.461.).
[26]Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", pp. 22-3.

(3) is true in virtue of rules of logical syntax, in the same way as (1). And if (2) is logically reducible to (3), and (3) is true, then (2) is true. Like (1), (2) is true regardless of what may come in experience, and which observation sentences are confirmed and disconfirmed by experience.

Since analytic sentences are true independently of the verification of any particular observation sentences, they are said to have no 'empirical content'. The sentences whose truth, on the other hand, do depend on certain observation sentences being confirmed do have empirical content. What this content is, i.e. what these sentences say about experience, is determined by what observation sentences they are reducible to. These sentences are called 'synthetic' sentences.

So, our sentences can be true in two ways. First, a sentence may be analytically true, and can be shown to be true by appeal to logical syntax itself. Second, a sentence may be synthetically true, and can be shown to be so by first reducing it to observation sentences, and then demonstrating that these observation sentences are confirmed by experience. Thus there are two distinct methods of verification. A sentence can be verified (depending on whether it is an analytic or synthetic sentence) either by an appeal to logical syntax itself, or by reduction to observation sentences via logical analysis. Either way, the acquisition and testing of knowledge is governed by the rules of logical syntax, and thus investigation of these rules will yield epistemological insights.

In this section we have seen how investigation into logical form might produce philosophical understanding. The method of logical analysis can firstly produce a better understanding of the working of inference. This understand will facilitate the philosopher by making clear what a sound argument consists in, and how natural language can trick us into fallacious arguments. Secondly, it will give us insights into meaning. And finally, it can give us insights into how we can verify sentences, and hence help us understand how we acquire knowledge.

Logical Positivism and Empiricism.

The method of logical analysis was to serve as a basis for a new empiricism. Like other empiricists before them, the Positivists gave verification a central role. Yet allowing for analytic truths enabled them also to account for the possibility of *a priori* knowledge (e.g. mathematical knowledge). But what was really new in this empiricism was that the relation between knowledge and experience was a logical one—that of 'reduction' via the rules of logical syntax.

The Positivists' views on logical syntax implied that any sentence that was not verifiable, either by appeal to logical syntax itself or by appeal to experience via

observation sentences, was meaningless. Therefore, the method of logical analysis implied that statements not ultimately concerned with logical syntax or experience were meaningless. Because of this, the Positivists argued that metaphysics was not a legitimate mode of enquiry, since statements about the noumenal world were meaningless. Metaphysical problems were banished, and branded as 'pseudo-problems'. The same view was taken of ethics, since sentences about values and norms could be neither logically nor empirically verified.

> Logical analysis, then, pronounces the verdict of meaninglessness on any alleged knowledge that pretends to reach above or behind experience. This verdict hits, in the first place, any speculative metaphysics, any alleged knowledge by *pure thinking* or by *pure intuition* that pretends to be able to do without experience. ... Further, the same judgement must be passed on all *philosophy of norms*, or *philosophy of value*, on any ethics or esthetics as a normative discipline. For the objective validity of a value or norm is ... not empirically verifiable nor deducible from empirical statements.
>
> (Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics", p. 77.)

With the emphasis on verification, then, epistemology comes to the fore. Verification itself was to be the concern of the experimental scientist, and the philosopher was to concern himself with the *method* of verification, by studying the logical syntax of scientific and everyday language. The philosopher's task was to ensure that the sciences did not offend against their rules of logical syntax, and to test the coherence and correctness of the rules themselves. And so we see as central concerns in the work of the Logical Positivists issues like: the relation between logical syntax and scientific method; the articulation of the logical syntax of the various sciences; the 'reduction' of scientific and/or everyday statements to observation statements; and the form and content of observation statements themselves. Philosophy was then to become a rather more formal discipline that it had been immediately before the rise of Logical Atomism and Logical Positivists. And it was hoped that the results of studying logical form would be rather more precise and more surely substantiated than those gleaning from metaphysical investigation. These hopes were, however, somewhat ill-founded.

Two Dogmas of Empiricism.

In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"[27], W. V. O. Quine carries out a two pronged attack on logical empiricism. The first prong comes in sections 1 to 4 of the paper, and

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[27]First published in *Philosophical Review*, January, 1951. Page numbers here refer to the reprint in *From a Logical Point of View*, pp. 20-46.

culminates in a rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Here Quine grants that given "[i]t is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact", it is tempting to suppose "in general that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component." And, "[g]iven this supposition, it next seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component should be null; and these are the analytic statements."[28] However, he attempts to argue that

> for all its a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 37.)

Quine begins his argument by making a distinction between two types of analytic sentence. Firstly there are *logical truths*, like

(1) No unmarried man is married

> The relevant feature of this example is that it not merely is true as it stands, but remains true under any and all reinterpretations of 'man' and 'married'. If we suppose a prior inventory of *logical* particles, comprising 'no', 'un-', 'not', 'if', 'then', 'and', etc., then in general a logical truth is a statement which is true and remains true under all reinterpretations of its components other than the logical particles.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", pp. 22-3.)

Secondly, there are statements like

(2) No bachelor is married.

> The characteristic of such a statement is that it can be turned into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms; thus (2) can be turned into (1) by putting 'unmarried man' for its synonym 'bachelor'.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 23.)

(1) is true purely in virtue of its logical form or structure. (2) is true because it can be converted into a logical truth (i.e. (1)) by replacing a word with a synonymous word. In his attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction Quine is prepared to grant that there are such things as 'logical truths'. His argument is against the claim that sentences like (2) are analytically true. The problem with the explanation of the analyticity of

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[28] *ibid.*, p. 36.

(2) is that it rests on an understanding of synonymy, which Quine insists is as much in need of explanation as analyticity itself. In support of this claim he explores various attempts to explain synonymy—i.e. definition, interchangability *salva veritate*, and an appeal to semantical rules.

Quine disposes of each of the purported explanations of synonymy as follows. Definition, he argues, presupposes rather than explains synonymy.[29] For purely extensional languages interchangability *salva veritate* will not guarantee synonymy. In such a language sameness of extension results in interchangability *salva veritate*, but it does not guarantee sameness of meaning (i.e. synonymy). For example, 'creature with a kidney' and 'creature with a heart' have the same extension, but it is clear that they are not synonymous. Things are no better for an intensional language, because intension (like definition) presupposes rather than explains synonymy.[30] Finally, Quine turns his attention to the idea that

> the difficulty in separating analytic statements from synthetic ones in ordinary language is due to the vagueness of ordinary language and that the distinction is clear when we have a precise artificial language with explicit "semantical rules".
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 32.)

Such semantical rules may take various forms, but none of these will justify the analytic-synthetic distinction. Firstly,

> [l]et us suppose ... an artificial language L_0 whose semantical rules have the form explicitly of a specification ... of all the analytic statements in L_0. The rules tell us that such and such statements, and only those, are the analytic statements of L_0. Now here the difficulty is simply that the rules contain the word 'analytic', which we do not understand! We understand what expressions the rules attribute analyticity to, but we do not understand what the rules attribute to those expressions.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 33.)

Alternatively, we may view these semantical rules as defining a new simple symbol 'analytic-for-L_0'. But on this approach the rules do not tell us anything about how the new symbol 'analytic-for-L_0' is to explain the term 'analytic'.[31]

Quine concludes that since we are unable precisely to define synonymy, we can no longer justify the claim that sentences like (2) are analytic. There are varying opinions on how successful Quine's attack on analyticity actually is. Some insist that

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[29] *ibid.*, pp. 24-7.
[30] *ibid.*, pp. 27-32.
[31] *ibid.*, p. 33.

even if there is a circle between analyticity, synonymy and meaning, this does not necessarily undermine its intelligibility.[32]

Yet even if we grant that Quine's arguments in sections 1- 4 are correct, we have already seen that the analytic-synthetic distinction can still be explained by an appeal to reductionism. Quine is well aware of this, and so sets out in section 5 of "Two Dogmas" to demonstrate that reductionism itself is another dogma of empiricism. This is the second prong of Quine's attack on logical empiricism, where the method of reduction itself comes under attack.

The Positivists have told us that the meaning of a sentence *s* is to be determined by investigation of the method of verifying *s*. Investigation of the method of verification consists of reducing *s* to a set of observation or protocol sentences. Sentence *r* can be said to be synonymous with *s* if it reduces to the same observation or protocol sentences—i.e. if its method of verification is the same as *s*. Once synonymy has been thus determined, then analyticity can be explained in terms of synonymy and logical truth.

Quine begins his attack on this explication of analyticity by asking

> [j]ust what are these methods which are to be compared for likeness? What, in other words, is the nature of the relation between statement and the experiences which contribute to or detract from it confirmation.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 38.)

Early in the movement, the Logical Positivists saw the relation as follows. Sentence *s* could be logically reduced to a set of protocol sentences. These protocol sentences are about private sense data. And so the relation between statement and experience is one of 'radical reduction'. Any meaningful statement could be fully reduced to incorrigible statements about private sense data. But by the time Quine wrote "Two Dogmas" (1951) this radical reductionism had been left behind. However, Quine insists,

> the dogma of reductionism has, in subtler and more tenuous form, continued to influence the thought of empiricists. The notion lingers that to each statement, or each synthetic statement, there is associated a unique range of possible sensory events such that the occurrence of any of them would add to the likelihood of truth of the statement, and that there is associated also another unique range of possible sensory events whose occurrence would detract from that likelihood. This notion is of course implicit in the verification theory of meaning.

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[32]See Miller, *Philosophy of Language*, pp. 120-3, and Grice and Strawson, "In Defence of a Dogma", pp. 149-53.

The dogma of reductionism survives in the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or infirmation at all.

(Quine, "Two Dogmas", pp. 40-1.)

Quine's denies that such confirming (or infirming) experiences can be associated with single statements, taken in isolation from the theory that contain them. Instead, he argues for what is now commonly known as the 'Duhem-Quine Thesis'. The essential claim is that

our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body.

(Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 41.)

Duhem argued that there was no such thing as a crucial experiment in physics. He claimed that testing a particular hypothesis by experiment involved presupposing the truth of many other statements—e.g., about instruments, measurement, physical laws etc. So, a single statement can only 'face the tribunal of experience' as a member of a set of statements, and not on its own.[33]

Quine expands on the argument in "Two Dogmas". He argues that all attempts to verify a single statement by appeal to experience would be undermined by the fact that judgements about recalcitrance cannot be made for any particular statement in isolation from the theory (set of statements) it comes from. There follows a reconstruction of Quine's argument.[34]

Let it be the case that I hold a theory T with a logic L. Say I derive the statement $I \rightarrow P$ from T via L, where I is to stand for certain initial observable conditions, and P for a further observable event. That is, I derive a prediction from my theory— $I \rightarrow P$ predicts that if I occurs, then P must also occur. To test if this statement is verified by my sense experiences I set up an experiment in which the conditions I are brought about. If P follows, then the statement is confirmed, and if P does not follow, it is infirmed. In other words, if P follows, my sense experience elicits from me the observational response $I \rightarrow P$, and if not then my sense experience elicits from me the observational response $I \,\&\, \neg P$.

Quine argues, however, that if the latter occurs (i.e. if I assent to $I \,\&\, \neg P$) this does not necessarily bring about the infirmation of $I \rightarrow P$. Rather, it is unclear what the sense experience might infirm. There are various options open to me. Since $I \rightarrow P$ was derived from T via L, I could blame the recalcitrance on any of the T-statements

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[33] See Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory.*

[34] The reconstruction closely follows Crispin Wright's presentation, in his "Inventing Logical Necessity", of Quine's arguments.

from which $I \rightarrow P$ followed. Or I could blame the recalcitrance on any of the laws of L used to derive $I \rightarrow P$ from T-premises.

So, while Quine allows that we can arrive at observation sentences (like $I \rightarrow P$) by logical deduction, he insists that this process does not link particular experiences to particular statements for purposes of conformation.[35] In the very act of comparing statement and experience we must invoke other subsidiary statements, and so a 'one-to-one' link cannot be forged.[36]

If this is the case, then the Positivists cannot depend on the claim that empirical content can be allocated statement by statement. Thus, the method of verification becomes confused, since there is no clear relation between particular statements and particular sense experiences. While observation statements can be logically deduced from theories, no particular statement can be reduced to a particular observation statements, and so confirmation cannot proceed statement by statement. Rather, we have some sort of confirmation holism, in which the unit of empirical significance is no longer the statement, but rather "the whole of science"— i.e., all the statements of our theory taken as a corporate whole.[37] Endorsing this holism, we embark on what Quine calls an "empiricism without the dogmas".[38]

Once this confirmation holism is accepted

> it becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. ... Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 43.)

To summarise then, reductionism will not make sense of analyticity construed as logical truth plus synonymy. Reductionism was supposed to serve as a method for identifying synonymous words and statements. Two statements would be synonymous if they were verified in the same way (i.e. reducible to the same observation sentences). Two words would be synonymous if they affected in the same way the method of verification for the statements that contained them. However, according to Quine, an isolated statement cannot be reduced to a set of observation statements. Rather, it is only in the context of a theory or set of statements that observation sentences can be deduced. And since the production of observation sentences depends on a set of statements, it is possible to revise any one of these

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[35] Quine, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[36] *ibid.*, pp. 42-3.
[37] *ibid.*, p. 42.
[38] *ibid.*, p. 42.

statements on the occurrence of recalcitrance. Experience, on its own, does not determine whether a particular statement is confirmed or infirmed.

> The totality of our knowledge or beliefs ... is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reëvaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", pp. 42-3.)

"Empiricism without the Dogmas."[39]

In section 6 of "Two Dogmas" Quine offers an alternative to an empiricism based on the dogma of reductionism. As we have seen, the method of reductionism fixed the relation between statements and experience. There might be disagreements on what evidence for a statement's truth actually consisted in (private sense data or publicly observable objects—cf. the famous debate between Neurath and Schlick[40]). Nonetheless, reductionism could still associate "a unique range of sensory events such that the occurrence of any of them would add to the likelihood of the truth of a [particular] statement".[41] In this way, reductionism makes clear what is to serve as empirical evidence for or against a statement.

But Quine has told us that "it is misleading to speak of empirical content of an individual statement", and so he will not associate experiences with statements in this way.[42] Yet he does not have to reject the notion of empirical content altogether. Following the Duhem-Quine thesis, he must treat the "whole of science" as the "unit of empirical significance".[43] Once this rule is observed, empirical content may be allocated to statements—but only in the context of their place in "the whole of science".

According to Quine

> total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements. Reëvaluation of some statements entails reëvaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections—the logical laws being in turn simply certain further

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[39] *ibid.*, pp. 42-6.
[40] See Neurath, "Protocol Sentences" and Schlick, "The Foundation of Knowledge".
[41] *ibid.*, p. 40.
[42] *ibid.*, p. 43.
[43] *ibid.*, p. 42.

statements of the system, certain further elements of the field. Having reëvaluated one statement we must reëvaluate some others, which may be statements of logical connections themselves.

(Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 42.)

So, all statements in the field are related via logical connections. Certain statements (observation sentences) stand at the edge of the field, and it is these that 'conflict' with experience. Once such a statement conflicts with experience, it would seem that it must be rejected. Doing so will have a knock-on effect inside the field on statements that are logically connected to this infirmed observation sentence. This knock-on effect may even alter the logical laws that govern the interconnections between statements within the field.

However, as Quine has pointed out against the reductionist, there is more than one option for how this re-evaluation could go. As a result, "[n]o particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole."[44] Instead there are various options as to what form the 'knock-on' effect takes. That is, a recalcitrant experience can be viewed as infirming any one of a number of statements. Which of these options is endorsed will determine how empirical content is to be distributed across the field of force that is our scientific theory. We are to decide between these various options by appealing to pragmatic considerations concerning conservation, simplicity, and further recalcitrance.[45]

The reader may have worried that Quine is supposing that the empirical content of observation sentences can be determined independently of the system that contained them—since it appears that the ability to determine whether they contradict experience is necessary for us to be able to distribute empirical content across the theory. However, it is our pragmatic considerations that are to determine which statements are to stand at the 'edge', and serve as observation sentences. These statements "though *about* physical objects and not sense experience, seem particularly germane to sense experience—and in a selective way: some statements to some experiences, others to others."[46]

[I]n this relation of "germaneness" I envisage nothing more than a loose association reflecting the relative likelihood, in practice, of our choosing one statement rather than another for revision in the event of recalcitrant experience.

(Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 43)

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[44]Quine, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[45]*ibid.*, pp. 42-3, 46.
[46]*ibid.*, p. 43.

So, observation sentences are said to have the empirical content they have because of the relative likelihood of their rejection, and not vice versa. Theoretical statements, on the other hand, "may be thought of as relatively centrally located within the total network; meaning merely that little preferential connection with any particular sense data obtrudes itself".[47] And also meaning that they are relatively unlikely candidates for revision.

Within this hierarchical system, "[p]hysical objects are conceptually imported ... as convenient intermediaries—not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer."[48] The positing of physical objects then serves as "a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience."[49] And, according to Quine, the positing does not stop with physical objects. He cites as other examples forces (like gravity) and the irrational numbers. Indeed, the only limiting factor on what can be posited to aid us in bringing structure to the "flux of experience" is that "[t]he edge of the system [including our posited entities] must be kept squared with experience; the rest, with all its elaborate myths and fictions, has as its objective the simplicity of laws."[50]

Theory, then, for Quine serves as a tool for 'coping' with experience. We may swell its ontology as we see fit, and as we find useful, as long as there is no clash with experience.[51] We may distribute empirical content across theory as we see fit, as long as we ensure that (a) "the edge of the system" squares with experience, and (b) our chosen distribution serves well as a method for 'coping' with and predicting experience.

Epistemology Naturalized.

With Quine's new view of how theory and experience relate comes a new view of epistemology.

> Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomena, viz. a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input—certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance—and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted

[47] *ibid.*, p. 44.
[48] *ibid.*, p. 44.
[49] *ibid.*, p. 44.
[50] *ibid.*, p. 45.
[51] *ibid.*, p. 45.

epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one's theory of nature transcends any available evidence.

(Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized", pp. 82-3.)

The epistemologist is to investigate, then, how each man "warps his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings".[52] Evidence relates to theory in the way we have already seen—i.e. it serves as a "boundary condition". The epistemologist may study what we do within these conditions by "[s]ubtracting our [empirical] cues from our world view", and thus uncovering our "net contribution to the difference". "This difference marks the extent of man's conceptual sovereignty—the domain within which he can revise theory while saving the data."[53]

As Quine says, the motivation for epistemology is the desire to discover how theory and evidence relate. With his rejection of reductionism and his 'naturalization' of epistemology, Quine has made a radical break from the Positivists regarding the relation between theory and evidence. For the Positivists, the relation was a logical one—i.e. the relation of reduction. Thus, logical analysis was to give great insights into how theory and evidence related, and how our beliefs were justified. Experience was to serve as the ultimate evidence, and the rules of logic were to determine the empirical content of statements and theories, and thus determine their verification conditions.

Quine, on the other hand, insists that the relation between theory and evidence is a much looser one than that offered by the Positivists. Empirical content cannot be allocated statement by statements, and hence verification conditions are not fixed. Experience still serves as ultimate evidence, which theory must 'fit'. But how exactly theory does 'fit' evidence is to be decided by pragmatic considerations. Indeed, even the logical rules associated with theory, which are used to derive empirical consequences from the theory, could be revised for pragmatic reasons. This possibility highlights the radical difference between Quine and the Positivists. No longer is the relation between theory and evidence (experience) fixed once and for all by the laws of logic. Rather, the relation can take one of numerous forms, and the decision of which form it takes is governed neither by logic nor by experience.

The Third Dogma.

Finally we come to our main topic—Davidson's third dogma of empiricism. Like Quine before him, Davidson criticises contemporary accounts of empiricism because

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[52] *ibid.*, p. 46.

[53] Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 5.

of their commitment to an unintelligible dualism. This time the dualism is that of conceptual scheme and uninterpreted content. He argues that anyone who holds a broadly Quinean view of how theory and evidence relate (see above) is committed to this dualism. As examples he cites Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, and Quine himself.

As we have seen, Quine claims that our theories impinge on experience "only along the edges."[54] What happens inside the web has as its objective only "the simplicity of laws."[55] Changes in theory can involve changes and additions to ontology, and the only limit on these changes is that the theory serves as "a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience."[56] According to Davidson, such ontological commitment requires that we have concepts with which we can individuate the objects we have posited. Thus our conceptual scheme governs what structure we work into the flux of experience. And now we have what Davidson calls the third dogma of empiricism—the dualism of conceptual scheme and content.[57] Conceptual scheme "organizes" or structures experience, and thus experience is "something waiting to be organized".

> I want to urge that this ... dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. The third, and perhaps the last, for if we give it up it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 189.)

In the chapter 2 we will see why Davidson believes that the scheme-content dualism "cannot be made intelligible and defensible". In chapter 3 we will explore Davidson's alternative to dogmatic empiricism.

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[54]Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 42.
[55]*ibid.*, p. 43.
[56]*ibid.*, p. 43.
[57]Davidson, OVICS, p. 189.

Chapter 2

2.1. Introduction.

In this chapter I will outline Davidson's arguments in OVICS for the claim that the scheme-content dualism is unintelligible and indefensible. The intention is to present Davidson's arguments as clearly as possible, rather than to offer a detailed defence of them. In explaining the arguments, however, it has been necessary to expand on their presentation in OVICS. Section 2.2 presents what I have called 'Davidson's Paradox'. This paradox, according to Davidson, undermines the intelligibility of conceptual relativism.

> The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

Davidson also argues that since endorsing the scheme-content dualism implies a commitment to conceptual relativism, the paradox will in fact undermine the very idea of a conceptual scheme.

In 2.2 I examine first the claim that the scheme-content dualism implies a commitment to conceptual relativism. Following this, I examine the paradox in detail, and following Davidson, unearth one possible solution. The rest of the chapter discusses Davidson's response to the proposed solution.

Section 2.3 explains how the notion of a non-translatable language may serve the schemer in constructing a solution to Davidson's Paradox. Section 2.4 then sets out Davidson's arguments against the possibility of non-translatable languages, and thus against the schemer's solution to the paradox.

Since this failed solution is the only one open to the schemer (as we shall see in 2.2), Davidson's Paradox holds, and conceptual relativism is shown to be indefensible. And since all schemers must accept conceptual relativism, the scheme-content dualism itself is shown to be indefensible. Thus we cannot make intelligible the very idea of a conceptual scheme.

2.2. 'Davidson's Paradox.'

> Conceptual schemes, we are told, are ways of organizing experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are points of view from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene. There may be no translating from one scheme to another, in which case the beliefs, desires, hopes, and bits of knowledge that characterize one person have no true counterparts for the subscriber to another scheme. Reality itself is relative to a scheme: what counts as real in one system may not in another.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

This is Davidson's target in OVICS. The above presentation picks out two essential aspects of the scheme-content dualism. Firstly, what schemes essentially do is 'organize', 'give form', or represent a 'point of view'. All these metaphors suggest that if there is one conceptual scheme, then there could be others—if there is one way of organising something, then there could be others; one way of giving form, then there could be others; one point of view, then there could be others. Secondly, "there may be no translating from one scheme to another", a characteristic otherwise known as 'incommensurability' or 'incomparability'.[1]

The method of attack is to show that these two aspects of the scheme-content dualism are contradictory, and hence undermine the intelligibility of the distinction itself. In the rest of this section two issues will be considered: (i) how these aspects contradict one another, and (ii) whether they really are both essential implications of an endorsement of the scheme-content dualism.

Davidson's Paradox.

This section will outline how Davidson draws out a contradiction between the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes and the fact that these alternative schemes are to be incommensurable. I have given his argument the title of 'Davidson's Paradox'. Here is the paradox as presented by the man himself:

> The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

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[1] Davidson takes 'non-translatable' and 'incommensurable' as meaning the same thing—see OVICS, pp. 186-88, and especially p. 190.

Spelling out the paradox will help us get clear about how it is to work.

Premises:
(1) There are different points of view.
(2) If (1), then there is a common system.
(3) Different points of view are dramatically incomparable.
(4) If a common system exists, then ¬ (3).

Conclusion:
(5) Therefore, there is a common system, AND there is not a common system.

(5) is a contradiction. It follows from the premises by applying modus ponens, modus tolens and conjunction introduction.[2] Normally the next step in an argument that produces a paradox or contradiction is a reductio ad absurdum. This strategy, if used here, will have far reaching effect—i.e. it will undermine the scheme-content dualism itself. This is the desired effect as far as Davidson is concerned. However, it must be shown that all the premises embody essential characteristics of the scheme-content dualism, if the reductio is to undermine the dualism. If we can still sanction such a dualism while rejecting one of the premises, then the reductio will not dissolve the dualism, but merely destroy what is inessential to it. My next task, then, is to consider whether each premise is an essential implication of the scheme-content dualism.

Defending the Premises.

Our four premises are: (1) There are different points of view; (2) If there are different points of view, then there is a common system on which to 'plot' them; (3) Different points of view are incomparable; (4) If there is a common system, then different points of view are not incomparable. What is to be considered is whether any of these premises are inessential to an endorsement of the scheme-content dualism. It will be shown that premises (2) and (4) may be inessential. Therefore, premises (1) and (3)

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[2] Here is the full formal proof:
P: There are different points of view; Q: There is a common system; R: Different points of view are incomparable.

1	(1) P	Ass.
2	(2) P → Q	Ass.
3	(3) R	Ass.
4	(4) Q → ¬R	Ass.
1,2	(5) Q	1,2 Modus Ponens.
3,4	(6) ¬Q	3,4 Modus Tolens.
1,2,3,4	(7) Q & ¬Q	5,6 & Introduction.

will be dealt with first, in order to demonstrate that the relativist must accept them. Only then will our attention be turned on (2) and (4), and why they may not be essential tenets of conceptual relativism.

The first premise is the one that Davidson, in the end, wants to blame for the contradiction. It is granted to the relativist in order to bring about the reductio. This is the premise that is to be shown as leading to absurdity. It may be rephrased as 'there are different conceptual schemes'. Therefore it is obvious that this premise embodies an essential characteristic of conceptual relativism—i.e. that there are alternative conceptual schemes. However, it does not immediately follow that someone endorsing the scheme-content dualism itself must accept this premise. For Davidson's paradox to undermine the dualism itself, it must be shown that the scheme-content dualism implies conceptual relativism. We have already touched on this subject, but now it is time to deal with it in more detail.

It was suggested earlier that the scheme-content dualism implied conceptual relativism. The reason was that if there was one way of organising, viewing or putting form on content, then there might possibly be others. Support for this idea can be found in an argument that is derived from what seems to be a rather cryptic passing comment in OVICS. Davidson states that

> [e]ven those thinkers who are certain there is only one conceptual scheme are in the sway of the scheme concept; even monotheists have religion. And when someone sets out to describe 'our conceptual scheme', his homey task assumes, if we take him literally, that there might be rival systems.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 183.)

Taking first the claim that "monotheists have religion". The point, presumably, is that whether you believe in one god or many, you are obviously committed to the existence of some sort of supernatural being(s) which stand in a certain relation to the natural world. Similarly, then, if one is committed to a particular relation between scheme and content, then one is committed to the dualism of scheme and content. Initially this seems as uninteresting as it is uncontentious. First impression may, however, be mistaken. To demonstrate why, I turn now to the claim that describing one scheme assumes that there "might be rival systems". It is unclear from the text what Davidson means by "might". As a result there are at least two possible readings of his claim here. Firstly, he could be read as claiming that if one is committed to the scheme-content dualism, then one must grant the *possible existence* of other schemes—i.e. one must grant that there might actually be other schemes.[3] Secondly,

[3]The phrase "rival systems" supports this suggestion. Another system would not be a rival if it was only intelligible, rather than possible.

he could be read as making the weaker claim that if one is committed to the scheme-content dualism, then one must grant only the *intelligibility* of the idea of other schemes. That is, while one can deny that there is or ever could be an alternative conceptual scheme, one must at least find the notion of an alternative conceptual scheme intelligible. So Davidson's argument for the claim that even 'mono-schemers'[4] are committed to conceptual relativism is as follows.

(a) If one is committed to a particular relation between scheme and content, then one is committed to the scheme-content dualism.
(b) If one is committed to the scheme-content dualism, then one is committed to the possibility/intelligibility of alternative schemes.
(c) If one is committed to the possibility/intelligibility of alternative schemes, then one is committed to conceptual relativism.

However, it seems that neither reading of this argument gives it any force. The stronger reading is *too* strong to have any force against the mono-schemer. To counter the argument, she will simply insist that in view of the fact that her scheme is the only one, it is clear that she is in no way committed to the *possible existence* of other schemes. Rather, it seems that she must, if she is to be consistent, deny the existence of other schemes. And so, (c) does not follow. The weaker reading has a parallel difficulty, in that it is too *weak* to have any force against the mono-schemer. To counter the argument on its weaker reading, she can argue that even if she does grant the *intelligibility* of other schemes, this in no way forces her to grant that there are or ever could be such schemes. There might have been other systems, but there are not. Again, (c) does not follow. So the mono-schemer is not committed to conceptual relativism—no matter how we are to interpret what Davidson means by "might".

However, I believe that Davidson's claim that endorsing the scheme-content dualism implies endorsing conceptual relativism may still be defended. With regards both readings of Davidson's argument, the mono-schemer's defence depends on her certainty that her scheme is the only one. Davidson's claim can be defended, then, by examining what evidence the mono-schemer could appeal to in order to justify her belief that there is only one scheme.

In her defence of the claim that there is only one scheme, the mono-schemer must offer as evidence either some facet of reality, some feature(s) of the mind, and/or some characteristic(s) of language (or logic) that supports the thesis. But, as we saw in (a) above, a mono-schemer is committed to the scheme-content dualism. And all

[4]That is, those who hold the view that there is only one conceptual scheme.

those committed to the scheme-content dualism are committed to the view that "[r]eality is relative to a scheme".[5] Also (as we shall see in 2.3) all a schemer's views of mind and of language are determined by the scheme they hold.[6] Therefore, any argument offered by the mono-schemer in defence of her position which appeals to the world ('reality'), the mind, or language will only reflect her own parochial point of view. If her arguments are just relative to scheme, their conclusion will not hold absolutely. Therefore, she cannot justify absolutely the claim that her scheme is the only one. Her endorsement of the scheme-content dualism commits her, whether she likes it or not, to the view that "there might be rival systems". This ensures that not only conceptual relativists, but all those who endorse the scheme-content dualism, must accept premise (1). We can now move onto premise (3). (Premises (2) and (4) will prove more problematic for Davidson, and will be left till last.)

Premise (3) was that differing points of view are incomparable. Conceptual relativism informs us that conceptual schemes may change across cultures or periods of time. As a result, we are told, it is sometimes impossible for someone who does not share the conceptual scheme of a particular culture or period to understand the theories and general world view of that culture or period. However, we *do* engage in investigation and interpretation of the peoples of many different cultures and periods—for example, via study in the academic subjects of anthropology and history. So it seems counter-intuitive to say that we cannot understand these peoples, when many clearly think that we can. However, incomparability (or incommensurability[7]) is a common doctrine of conceptual relativism.[8] The reason for this counter-intuitive commitment is, I argue below, that a failure to endorse the incommensurability of conceptual schemes undermines the explanatory force and philosophical interest of conceptual relativism. To demonstrate why, let us imagine that there were alternative conceptual schemes, but that they were comparable (by whatever method). Is there something offensive to the relativist in this thought experiment?

In this thought experiment alternative conceptual schemes can be 'reformulated' into ours, so one cannot argue that what is essential to the difference of world view across cultures and history is the presence of different conceptual schemes. Accepting comparability does not undermine the claim that there could be alternative conceptual schemes. However, it does undermine the claim that the *reason* these cultures are different is that they have a different conceptual scheme. If the conceptual relativist rejects premise (3), then she must reject the claim that talk of

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[5]Davidson, OVICS, p. 183.

[6] See below pp. 35-9.

[7] See, for example, Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ch. X, and Feyerabend, "Explanation, Reduction and Empiricism", section 7.

[8] For some 20th century examples, see Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

alternative conceptual schemes is ultimately explanatory of examples of individual, cultural and historical diversity—alternative conceptual schemes might be a symptom of difference, but not a cause. So to retain the explanatory power, and the philosophical excitement, of conceptual relativism, the relativist must accept premise (3).[9]

So far, we have seen that the relativist is committed to premises (1) and (3). Now let us return to what I initially claimed would be the problematic premises, i.e. (2) and (4). Here is premise (2):

> Different points of view makes sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

It is tempting to read this premise as demanding not only the existence of a "common system", but also that we have some sort of access to, or knowledge of, this system. Thus the premise may be said to have two possible readings—one 'ontological' and the other 'epistemological'. The former demands only the existence of a common system. The latter demands that we have some knowledge of the features of this system.

The epistemological reading is supported by the metaphor of 'plotting'. This metaphor implies that the reason there must be a common system is to facilitate us in determining that different points of view *are* different. We are to differentiate points of view by reference to something common to both. Points of view can be seen to differ when we compare how they organise or deal with common content. Of course, if we are to defer to this common content in order to differentiate points of view, then we must know something about the features of the "common co-ordinate system".

Premise (4) is also concerned with this common system, but it initially seems to lend itself to an ontological reading. Here is the premise again:

> the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

Here all that is mentioned is "the existence of a common system". There seems to be no demand for knowledge of or access to this system. However, the premise seems more plausible if we give it an epistemological reading. As with (2), both possibilities will be considered.

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[9]See Kuhn, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-5.

Let us begin our investigation of premises (2) and (4) by reformalising Davidson's paradox with the stronger epistemological reading of both premises.

Premises:
(1) There are different points of view.
(2) If (1), then we must have direct access[10] to a common system.
(3) Differing points of view are incomparable.
(4) If we have direct access to a common system, then ¬(3).

Conclusion:
(5) We must have direct access to a common system, but we do not have direct access to a common system.

On the strong readings of (2) and (4) we get a contradiction, and so Davidson's Paradox holds. Davidson, of course, wants to blame the first premise for this unacceptable conclusion. But could any of the other assumptions be put aside in order to overcome the conclusion?

The relativist might want to insist that (2) is too strong, and should be replaced by the weaker ontological reading:

(2) If there are different points of view, then there must exist a common system.

The argument would then be as follows:

Premises:
(1) There are different points of view.
(2) If (1), then a common system must exist.
(3) Differing points of view are incomparable.
(4) If we have direct access to a common system, then ¬(3).

Conclusion:
(5) A common system must exist, but we do not have direct access to a common system.

[10] By "direct access" I mean knowledge not acquired or justified via a perspective—i.e. a 'God's Eye View', one not associated with a particular scheme.

The conclusion is now clearly not a contradiction. Nor does it seem unacceptable. It may very well be the case that there is a common system, or a common source of content, but that we do not have any knowledge of it except through our own scheme.

But Davidson can respond in kind by replacing the strong epistemological reading of (4) with the weaker ontological reading. Since the consequent of (2) and the antecedent of (4) are now again the same, a contradiction again results. At this stage, there are two options open to the schemer. Firstly, she can try to reject (2) altogether. Or secondly, she can try to reject (4) altogether. The two options will be considered in turn.

Firstly, then, what if the schemer were to reject (2) altogether, i.e. reject the idea that the existence of differing points of view implies anything about 'common systems'? This view entails that there is no common thing that schemes 'organize' differently. As was said before, the reason that the positing of alternative conceptual schemes was viewed as explanatory was because differences in world view, physical theory etc., could be explained in terms of difference(s) of conceptual scheme. That is, different schemes organise content differently, and hence a different world view results. If there is no common thing that conceptual schemes organise, then difference could just as well be explained without reference to conceptual schemes at all. If there is not something shared between different individuals, cultures or periods—e.g. the world, experience, nature, or, in generally some source of content—then differences of world view between individuals, cultures, and periods would not be as a result of different conceptual schemes. Rather, world-views would be different because the world would be different. So, rejecting the existence of something common to different conceptual schemes undermines the explanatory power of conceptual relativism, and does away with any need to posit conceptual change across cultures etc.

So, both the epistemological and ontological reading of (2) contribute to the unacceptable conclusion of Davidson's paradox. And, while the schemer may reject the strong epistemological reading of (2), she cannot reject the ontological reading (2). For to do so would be to undermine conceptual relativism, and hence the scheme-content dualism, altogether.

The schemer's final resort then is to attempt to reject (4). Her position is looking increasingly difficult. However, it appears that her last option may be the one that saves her. Here is a reason to think that she might be able to reject (4), and thus avoid Davidson's paradox. As we have seen, Davidson must weaken (4) to an ontological reading in order to maintain the paradox. So (4) now claims that if there is a common system (an ontological claim), then differing points of view cannot be incomparable. But the mere existence of such a system does not undermine incomparability. Even granting that differing points of view only make sense if there

is such a common system, the relativist can still maintain that schemes *are* incomparable. She can do so because the antecedent of (4) is an ontological, and not an epistemological claim. A 'common system' or source of content can exist without anyone have a 'God's Eye View' of it, and so the antecedent of (4) can be true while the consequent is false. Thus (4) can be rejected by the schemer as a false premise.

We can now sum up what we have learnt so far. Davidson's paradox rests on an alleged contradiction between the method for identifying alternative conceptual schemes, and the necessity for conceptual schemes to be incomparable. The idea is that we could only tell that conceptual schemes are different if we could determine how each organised the content that is common to them all. That is, to tell whether schemes are different, we must compare them via what they have in common—i.e. a common source of content (e.g. the world, experience, etc.). But this would, of course, undermine incomparability. The solution to the paradox that is now offered involves the rejection of premise (4). This premise, on its ontological reading, can be rejected because the mere existence of common content, or a 'common system' does not undermine incomparability. Only 'direct' knowledge of such a common source of content can undermine incomparability. The problem with this solution is that if we do not have direct knowledge of a common source, then *how* are we to tell that conceptual schemes are different? Thus the solution must be supported by a demonstration that it is possible to identify alternative conceptual schemes without appeal to direct or unconceptualised knowledge of the source of content. Such a demonstration attempts to make sense of 'uninterpreted content'. That is, it attempts to make sense of the idea that there is a scheme-content dualism, but that we cannot know anything about the source of content. There is such a source, and it supplies us all with the same information, which our schemes 'organise'. But we cannot know anything about this source of content, or about the information it supplies us with, except through our conceptual scheme. Thus we must make sense of there being such a source, and of our conceptual scheme 'organising' or 'interpreting' the uninterpreted information or content that it supplies us with.

However, Davidson spends the majority of his time in OVICS arguing that such a demonstration is impossible, and thus we cannot make sense of the notion of uninterpreted content.

Sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 will deal with Davidson's arguments against such a demonstration, but before that there is one more aspect of Davidson's strategy against the schemer that must be discussed and defended—that is, the claim that "[w]e may accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme."[11]

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[11]Davidson, *op. cit.*, 184.

2.3. Languages and Conceptual Schemes.

Anyone who reads OVICS is more likely to think that it is mainly about the impossibility of non-translatable languages rather than about attacking a possible response to something called 'Davidson's Paradox'. In this section I will show what non-translatable languages have to do with 'Davidson's Paradox', and how arguing that there are no non-translatable language will suffice to show that the paradox holds in the face of the possible response suggested in 2.2.

Davidson claims that (for the schemer at least) languages must be associated with conceptual schemes in such a way that translation cannot occur between any two languages associated with two different schemes. So the schemer might be able to identify conceptual difference by exploring linguistic difference. If the schemer could identify a language (whether this be through observation of what appears to be linguistic activity, or investigation of 'texts', or whatever) that was in principle non-translatable without making any appeal to knowledge of uninterpreted content and its source, then he could claim to have identified conceptual difference while avoiding Davidson's Paradox. The first step in thus "[s]tudying the criteria of translation ... [as] a way of focusing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes" is to defend the claim that

> [w]e may accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme. The relation may be supposed to be this: where conceptual schemes differ, so do languages. But speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into another.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

There are two separate claims to be justified here. The first is that we can associate languages with conceptual schemes. The second is that we can associate language with conceptual scheme in the way suggested. These claims can be seen to be independent on recognition of the fact that one could accept the first while rejecting the second. In this section I will first deal with the more general claim that we can associate language with conceptual scheme. It will become clear why one should accept this claim, and what exactly the term "associate" means in this context. Then I will turn my attention to the more specific claim that inter-translatable languages should all be associated with the same scheme.

Firstly, then, the claim that we can associate language and conceptual scheme. Davidson's argument is that not to do so will incur unacceptable results, and so it follows that we must associate language and scheme.

The first of these unacceptable results is as follows: if language does not reflect the structure of scheme, then language necessarily distorts reality. Reality is relative to scheme, so if language does not reflect or agree with scheme, then it must distort reality. This view of language entails that "it is only wordlessly if at all that the mind comes to grips with things as they really are". And "[t]his is to conceive language as an inert . . . medium independent of the human agencies that employ it; a view of language that surely cannot be maintained."[12]

It may seem strange to talk of language agreeing with or distorting reality. As Peter Hacker points out in his discussion of OVICS, a language is a grammar and a vocabulary, and not in any sense a theory.

> In a given language there is a possibility of constructing indefinitely many different and incompatible theories, but the language in which such theories are constructed and articulated is itself no theory about anything.
>
> (Hacker, "On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", p. 297.)

If languages are not theories about anything, then what does Davidson mean by language "distorting reality"? Elsewhere, Davidson has said that "[w]hat I had in mind as the scheme was language, with its built-in ontology and theory of the world".[13] We have yet to see how scheme and language are 'associated', but the quote does give us an insight into what Davidson has in mind when he is talking about language in OVICS. In OVICS language is not just a grammar and vocabulary. Instead it is like a conceptual scheme in that it has its own "organizing structure".[14] We will see in more detail what this organising structure consists in section 2.4.2, but for the time being it should be borne in mind what Davidson means by language in this context.[15] And if we do this, it should be clear what Davidson means by language being 'associated' with conceptual scheme. A language is associated with a conceptual scheme if it embodies ontological commitments and a theory that concur with the organising structure of that scheme—i.e. if its ontological and theoretical commitments utilise only the conceptual tools of this particular scheme.

Returning to Davidson's argument then, we can agree that language is neither inert nor independent of speakers. But why are we forced to the conclusion that

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[12] *ibid.*, p. 185.

[13] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence", p. 69.

[14] Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.

[15] It may be pointed out in defence of Davidson's taking language as having a built-in ontology and theory of the world, that this is very much the view of language held by Quine in "Two Dogmas" and *Word and Object*. And since Davidson is arguing against Quine, it will strengthen his argument if he grants as much to Quine as possible, and still shows that Quine is committed to the third and final dogma of empiricism.

language has these characteristics when we deny that languages can be associated with conceptual schemes? As we have seen, if language is not associated with conceptual scheme it distorts reality, and so "it is only wordlessly if at all that mind comes to grips with things as they really are". [16] Consequently, language is not involved in any systematic way in the relation between mind and world—rather it undermines the relation. As it is not a reliable guide to reality, it will encourage false belief. And in doing so, it will misdirect an agent on how to act on his intentions, and to bring about desired changes in the world. So it will not serve as a link from world to mind, nor from mind to world.

However, according to Davidson, the unpleasant results of claiming that language and scheme are not associated do not end here. He claims that the denial of such an association results not only in "a view of language that surely cannot be maintained", but also in a view of mind that is equally unsatisfactory.

> [I]f the mind can grapple without distortion with the real, the mind itself must be without categories and concepts. This featureless self . . . [is] an inescapable conclusion from certain lines of reasoning . . . but one that should always persuade us to reject the premisses.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 185.)

This argument is not altogether convincing. Davidson presumably thinks that if language will not serve as a link between mind and world, then mind itself must "grapple ... with the real". But even if he is right in this assumption, it does not follow that "the mind itself must be without categories and concepts." Surely the mind could grapple with the real by virtue of certain mental categories? Thus, the schemer could still insist that reality is relative to a scheme. The fact that the scheme is purely mental, and not reflected in language, does not undermine this claim in any way. Therefore, it seems that Davidson is mistaken in believing that if language is not associated with scheme, then minds are featureless (i.e. without categories or concepts). Nonetheless, it remains the case that thinking of language and scheme as absolutely separate entails an unacceptable view of language—i.e. that it is independent of the human agencies that employ it. Hence we should rather associate language and scheme.

How, then, is language to be associated with scheme? In answering this question we turn our attention to Davidson's more specific claim about the relationship. As we have seen, he states that

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[16]Davidson, OVICS, p. 185.

[t]he relation may be supposed to be this: where conceptual schemes differ, so do languages. But speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into another.

(Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

Why so? Two reasons. Firstly, Davidson maintains that "[s]tudying the criteria of translation is . . . a way of focusing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes". We limit our focus to the relation between *language* and scheme, and put to one side issues about how mind might relate to language and scheme. If we "have to imagine mind, with its organizing categories, operating with a language with *its* organizing structure", we lose this focus, and unnecessarily complicate the issue by having to worry over whether mind or language "is to be master".[17]

But while this may justify us in putting issues about mind and scheme to one side, we still have not explained why language and scheme should be related in the way suggested above. Why should "criteria of translation" serve as "criteria of identity for conceptual schemes"? In answering this, we get our second reason. I have already argued that it is essential for alternative conceptual scheme to be incommensurable. Conceptual relativism, and hence the very idea of conceptual schemes, makes no sense if there can be comparison across schemes. If languages are associated with schemes in such a way that translatable languages are linked to differing schemes, then incommensurability will be undermined. And so will the whole idea of conceptual schemes. So,

(1) schemes must be incomparable
(2) if languages associated with two such schemes are translatable, then the schemes will not be incomparable
(3) hence language(s) associated with one particular scheme must not be translatable into languages associated with another scheme.

Where translation is possible between languages, these languages must be associated with the same conceptual scheme.

To sum up, we have seen how Davidson may defend the following claims: on accepting the scheme-content dualism we may (1) associate languages with conceptual schemes, and (2) hold that "[t]he relation may be supposed to be this: ... speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into the other." (1) was justified by the fact that rejecting it led to an unacceptable view of language as "independent of the human

[17] *ibid.*, p. 184.

agencies that employ it."[18] (2) was justified by the fact that rejecting it would make incomparability (incommensurability) impossible, and so undermine the scheme-content dualism itself.

These views of the relation between language and scheme might, however, have their own unpalatable implications. Davidson himself suggests that if languages are associated with conceptual schemes in the way just mentioned, one might think it possible to "take up a vantage point for comparing conceptual schemes by temporarily shedding one's own".[19] The idea here is that if the schemer is only committed to language being associated with conceptual scheme, then she could step outside her own point of view simply by appealing to thought rather than language. Maybe mind is not associated with scheme or point of view like language, and hence could offer us such a "vantage point". Davidson denies that this move is possible, since

> [l]anguages we will not think of as separable from souls; speaking a language is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 185.)

But in doing so, it seems Davidson is disregarding his own advice. As we saw above, he suggests that it is sensible to concentrate on language and translation as "a way of focusing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes"[20], because not to do so would double our work,

> for then we would have to imagine the mind, with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with *its* organizing structure. Under the circumstances we would certainly want to ask who is to be master.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.)

The question of "who is master" is indeed a controversial one—one need only think about the inconclusive discussions of Wittgenstein's private language argument, and Davidson's own theses on the subject in "Thought and Talk".[21] We have been given the sensible advice to avoid the issue if at all possible. But Davidson's argument against the possibility of 'shedding' is that "speaking a language is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought".[22] Here we have a judgement about "who is to be master", and a judgement with no argument to support it.

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[18] *ibid.*, p. 185.
[19] *ibid.*, p. 185.
[20] *ibid.*, p. 184.
[21] Davidson, "Thought and Talk", in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 155-70.
[22] Davidson, OVICS, p. 185.

Such an argument is, however, close at hand. In the previous paragraph it was argued that "if mind can grapple without distortion with the real, the mind itself must be without categories and concepts", and hence featureless—an unacceptable conclusion that divorces the mind from the traits that constitute it.[23] I rejected this argument because it seemed that even if language was not to be associated with conceptual scheme, mind might still be, and so might grapple with the real via concepts and categories. However, in the case of 'shedding' language, and hence conceptual scheme, via the mind, this argument will be effective. If thought does allow us to shed our scheme and grapple directly with the uninterpreted content which different schemes interpret, then mind must be without categories and concepts. But does this entail that it is featureless? Perhaps not, since in 'grappling' with reality the mind might come to reflect the features of this reality free of distorting schemes. This view implies that this 'reality' has features, which it may not. But even if we accept that it does, this attempt at gaining a vantage point outside all schemes can be shown to fail. For if mind does, in whatever way, reflect the features of reality, then it must do so via some basic categories and concepts. Therefore, mind will be embedded in a conceptual scheme, albeit the 'right' one. Thus an appeal to thought will not allow us to step outside scheme. Disregarding our language and turning instead to thought will not allow us to 'shed' scheme. If mind could help us to disentangle ourselves from our scheme or point of view, then it would be featureless—an unacceptable result. And if it is not featureless, it cannot be without categories and concepts, and so embodies a conceptual scheme.

We are now justified in associating having a language with having a conceptual scheme, and so we may study the criteria of translation as "a way of focusing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes". Languages must be associated with conceptual scheme, for not to do so leads to an unacceptable view of language, and they must be associated with schemes in the way Davidson suggests because not to do so would undermine incomparability. Finally, in focusing on language and its relation to scheme, we do not allow the possibility of shedding scheme by shedding language.

In accepting "the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme", Davidson's strategy against the schemer is fixed. We saw in section 2.2 that the schemer's only option in the face of Davidson's paradox was to reject the claim that an ontological commitment to a common something which all schemes organised undermines incomparability. The problem with this move is that it requires the schemer to demonstrate how we are to identify different conceptual schemes if we cannot have any direct knowledge of the common thing that different

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[23] *ibid.*, p. 185.

schemes organise. Focusing on language, in the way Davidson suggests, may help the schemer. Since languages are associated with schemes, we may identify schemes by their associated languages. And since languages associated with one scheme cannot be translated into languages associated with another scheme, then we may identify alternative conceptual schemes by identifying non-translatable languages. A non-translatable language will serve as a criterion for identifying an alternative conceptual scheme.[24] The obvious advantage of this approach is that it makes no appeal to direct knowledge of common content or the common world that schemes share. Davidson's strategy then is to show that we cannot identify non-translatable languages, and thus we have no evidence of conceptual difference. "My strategy will be to argue that we cannot make sense of total failure [of translation]."[25]

2.4. Non-Translatable Languages

Introduction.

In OVICS Davidson considers two contemporary attempts by schemers to demonstrate that non-translatable languages can serve as evidence for alternative conceptual schemes. The first is a strategy associated most famously with Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. The second is the strategy advocated by Davidson's main target—Quine. The former will be discussed in section 2.4.1, and the latter in 2.4.2.

The first strategy is to claim that a certain kind of meaning change will serve as evidence for conceptual change. This special type of meaning change (sometimes called 'meaning variance') only occurs as a result of a certain type of theory change.[26]

> We may now seem to have a formula for generating distinct conceptual schemes. We get a new out of an old scheme when the speakers of a language come to accept as true an important range of sentences they previously took to be false (and, of course, vice versa). We must not describe this change simply as a matter of their coming to view old falsehoods as truths, for a truth is a proposition, and what they come to accept, in accepting a sentence as true, is not the same thing that they rejected when formerly they held the sentence to be false. A change has come over the meaning of the sentence because it now belongs to a new language.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 188.)

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[24] *ibid.*, pp. 184-5, 190-1.

[25] *ibid.*, p. 185.

[26] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, chapter X, and Feyerabend, "Explanation, Reduction and Empiricism", section 7.

What signifies conceptual change, then, is a change in theory and language. This change does not simply involve a redistribution of truth values across the statements of a theory, but a revision of the meanings of these statements. This change in meaning is supposed to result from a change in the descriptive resources of the language—i.e. a change in the concepts embodied in the language. Thus this type of change in meaning is to serve as evidence for conceptual change. The new language cannot, of course, be translated into the old (if it could, then incomparability would be undermined). But such a change in language can be identified by the retention of old vocabulary used in a new way. For example, while Einsteinean dynamics retains much of the Newtonian vocabulary, these terms no longer have the same meaning. They have a new meaning as a result of being part of a new language, and this new language cannot be translated into the old.[27]

The second strategy is to explain non-translatable languages and their relation to alternative schemes by reference to the notion of 'empirical content'. The idea is that languages associated with different conceptual schemes will have different relations to empirical content. Or, to put it in terms closer to what Quine says in "Two Dogmas", empirical content is distributed through the language differently depending on what conceptual scheme it embodies. If all languages stand in a certain relation with empirical content, then a language (whether it is translatable or not) can be recognised as being a language if it can be discovered that it stands in some relation to empirical content. Thus, non-translatable languages can be recognised by investigation of how they relate to empirical content, and since the language relates to content in the way it does (at least partly) because of the conceptual scheme it embodies, then recognition of non-translatable languages will also be recognition of alternative conceptual schemes.

I will now consider each strategy in more detail, beginning with the strategy of meaning variance.

2.4.1. Meaning Variance and Non-Translatable Languages.

According to Kuhn, scientists operating in different scientific traditions (within different 'paradigms') 'work in different worlds'. Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense* begins with the remark that 'It is possible to imagine kinds of worlds very different from the world as we know it'. ... The metaphors are, however, not at all the same. Strawson invites us to imagine possible non-actual worlds, worlds that might be described, using our present language, by redistributing truth values over sentences in various systematic ways. The clarity of the contrasts between the worlds in this case depends on supposing our scheme of concepts, our descriptive resources, to remain fixed. Kuhn, on the other hand, wants us to

[27]See Kuhn, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-2.

think of different observers of the same world who come to it with incommensurable systems of concepts. Strawson's many imagined worlds are seen or heard or described from the same point of view; Kuhn's one world is seen from different points of view. It is the second metaphor we want to work on.

(Davidson, OVICS, pp. 186-7.)

As Davidson presents him, Kuhn is a schemer. He wishes to explain difference in world-view by pointing to differences in conceptual apparatus.[28] As a schemer, he must grant that all schemes 'organise' or 'give form to' something common to all schemes. But in order to avoid Davidson's paradox, he must not rely on knowledge of this common something as evidence for alternative conceptual schemes. We have already heard a little of Kuhn's solution to the problem (which is also endorsed by Feyerabend). Conceptual change and/or difference can be identified by an appeal to meaning variance. Meaning variance is to serve as evidence for conceptual difference.

This section is to consider Kuhn and Feyerabend's attempted solution. Firstly, I will present some common arguments for the theory-dependence of meaning. Secondly, following Davidson, I will explain how the theory-dependence of meaning is to support the scheme-content dualism. Finally, I will examine Davidson's argument against this defence of the dualism of scheme and uninterpreted content.

The Failure of Reductionism (Again).

The acceptance of the view that meaning is theory-dependent is closely linked with the rejection of reductionism, and the reductionist construal of analyticity, to be found in Quine. Some historians of philosophy see Kuhn's work as a reaction against pure 'logical analysis', replacing Carnapian analysis of scientific language with considerations of the social factors that determine meaning in scientific language.[29] More specifically, the shortcomings of the Positivist approach to scientific language serve as a springboard for the theories of Kuhn and Feyerabend. In this section, some of these shortcomings will be highlighted, and it will be demonstrated how these shortcomings support the thesis of meaning variance or the theory-dependence of meaning.

A central problem for an empiricist philosophy of science is to account for the meaning of theoretical terms. Since these terms refer to unobservables, it is not difficult to see why an empiricist would be uneasy about them. Two of the strengths

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[28] *ibid.*, section IX, especially, pp. 102-3, 109.

[29] See, for example, Friedman, "Logical Positivism", p. 794, and Papineau, *Theory and Meaning*, pp. 35-7.

of empiricism are that it promises straight-forward answers to two central questions—the "semantico-ontological question" and the "epistemological question".

> On the *semantico-ontological* question of what our expressions *refer* to empiricism says simply that each expression refers to that entity which is the object of the associated sense impression. And it deals just as comfortably with the *epistemological* question of how we can *know* whether a given statement is true—any statement can in principle be assessed for truth by reference to the sensory experiences we actually have.
>
> (Papineau, *Theory and Meaning*, p. 5.)

However, theoretical terms make these questions rather more difficult for the empiricist to answer.

Firstly, what entities do theoretical terms refer to? The empiricists cannot say that they refer to the "object of the associated sense impression", because it seems that there are no associated sense impressions. Theoretical entities are, as we have said, non-observable. Secondly, how do we know whether a given statement containing theoretical terms is true? Again, and for the same reason, the empiricist's initial answer will not do. We cannot assess theoretical statements for truth "by reference to the sensory experiences we actually have", because none of our sensory experiences have as their object an entity referred to by theoretical terms. It seems that since theoretical terms refer to unobservable entities, empiricism can tell us nothing about what they mean, what they refer to, or how theoretical statements are to be verified.

To solve this problem, empiricists have insisted that even though theoretical entities are unobservable, it is not the case that they cannot be associated with certain sensory experiences. Various attempts were made by the Logical Positivists to explain how theoretical terms are thus 'associated'. One such attempt concluded that all theoretical terms were explicitly definable in terms of observation expressions. This view was supported by the aspirations of what Quine calls 'radical reductionism'.[30] (We have seen an example of radical reductionism in section 1.3—that of Carnap in "The Elimination of Metaphysics".)

However, it soon became evident that the claims of radical reductionism were too strong, and "[b]y the middle of the century most empiricist philosophers of science had come to accept that theoretical terms neither are, nor should be, precisely definable in observational language."[31] Instead it was claimed that there were two scientific languages—theoretical and observational—joined by 'correspondence rules'.[32] The solution to the problem of theoretical terms offered by this 'double

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[30]Quine, "Two Dogmas", pp. 39-40.

[31]Papineau, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[32]See, for example, Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, ch. 5.

language model' was not unlike that offered by radical reductionism. While not claiming that theoretical terms and statements were completely reducible to observation terms and statements, the double language model did maintain that the meaning of theoretical terms depended on the connections between theoretical and observational language. And since theoretical statements could still be linked to observational ones, it was still possible for the double language model to defend the classical empiricist answers to the semantico-ontological and epistemological questions.

Or so it initially seemed. In fact, neither radical reductionism nor the double language model could succeed in solving the problem of theoretical terms. And they both failed for the same reasons—because reductionisms of this sort both under- and over-define theoretical terms.[33]

Firstly, whichever type of reductionism we endorse, it will *under-define* many theoretical terms. We may allow that it is possible to pick out sensory experiences (or associated observational terms) that will encourage the application of a theoretical term. Even so, the theoretical term will often be applicable when these sensory conditions do not obtain. For example, a reductionist may explicate the simple theoretical term 'temperature' in terms of observable readings on thermometers. It is clear, though, that we may meaningfully attribute temperature to a body in the absence of such observations. This under-definition can be generalised as follows:

> [M]ost, if not all, theoretical terms are *dispositional* with respect to observations: they specify that certain observable features would be displayed if certain circumstances were to obtain. That an entity does do something observable in actual circumstances is of course a circumstance describable in observational terms. But that it would do something observable in different circumstances, is not itself an observable state of affairs, nor is it clear how it can be reduced to one.
>
> (Papineau, *Theory and Meaning*, p. 6.)

Secondly, reductionism *over-defines* theoretical terms. This results from the fact that there is often more than one observational method for determining whether a theoretical term is applicable. Consider 'temperature' again. We may discover the temperature of a body by applying a mercury thermometer to it, or a gas thermometer, or an alcohol thermometer, etc. Which of these various methods then is to serve as a reductive definition of the theoretical term? We cannot decide between them for purely observational reasons, for they are all legitimate observation methods. Then perhaps we should allow that the term may be defined by reference to *all* the observation methods. But what if there is disagreement between any of the

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[33]In what follows I closely follow the presentation of these issues in Papineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-18.

methods—what if our gas thermometers and our mercury thermometers give different readings for the same body at the same time? In this case the observational situation is clear (i.e. there is no denying that the methods disagree in result). But there is no way of deciding between them. We cannot determine which observation definition is wrong (since there is no right and wrong in this case, only definition). Therefore, the observational definitions overdefine the term 'temperature'.

If reductionism both under- and over-defines theoretical terms, it is clear that it offers no solution to the problem of theoretical terms. Firstly, consider the problem of what theoretical terms refer to. Because of the under-definition of theoretical terms by reductionism, this reductionism (whatever form it takes) will not serve to determine the referent of theoretical terms. If the application of the observational terms and/or statements associated with a theoretical term do not exhaust all the possible applications of the theoretical term, then it cannot be claimed that the referent of the theoretical term is merely the object (or objects) of the sense experiences allied to the observational terms and statements.

Also, the over-definition of theoretical terms by reductionism undermines the ability of this reductionism to determine the referent of theoretical terms. Since it may be unclear which of the observational terms associated with a theoretical term is to determine its meaning, then it cannot be claimed that the referent of the theoretical term is the object of sense experiences allied to any particular observational term.

Secondly, we may consider the problem of how we know that a statement containing a theoretical term is true. Since theoretical terms are under-defined by reductionism, a statement containing theoretical terms may be true even when the sense experiences associate with that term do not occur. And since theoretical terms are also over-defined by reductionism, it is not clear which sense experiences associated with a theoretical term *do* confirm a statement containing that term and which do not.

The Theory-Dependence of Meaning.

The failure of the reductionist project in philosophy of science led many (including Kuhn and Feyerabend) to question the worth of a complete separation of the theoretical from the observable. Instead of attempting to reduce theoretical terms to observation terms, it was now suggested that how we apply observation terms is, in some way, *theory-dependent*. This section attempts to outline some arguments for this new approach.

Such an approach completely reverses the direction of explanation. Now we are to look to theory in order to understand observation, where before we did the exact opposite. The latter approach, as we have seen, had its own problems. However, we

can at least say that it is rather more intuitive than the former. It is intuitive because we think that we have a better understanding of observation language than theoretical language. Observational terms are associated with sensory events, and as a result it is fairly clear when they apply and when not, and to what. Theoretical terms, on the other hand, refer to unobservable entities, so we do not know when to apply them, or to what. Therefore, it seems intuitive to try to understand the latter in terms of the former, and not vice versa.

However, the supporters of the view that the meaning of observation terms are theory-dependent consider such intuitions to be wrong. It is not the case, they say, that observational terms can be individually and clearly assigned a certain set of sensory circumstances which warrant their application. Rather it is our theoretical generalisations that govern how observation terms are associated with sensory experiences.[34]

Both Kuhn and Feyerabend defend such a view. Kuhn suggests that changes in theory prompt changes in what scientists 'see'. He suggests that these changes in observation are not unlike 'gestalt switches', and he finds much work in psychology on perception and gestalt switches as suggestive of how observation is influenced by theory.

> It is as elementary prototypes for these transformations of the scientist's world that the familiar demonstrations of a switch in visual gestalt prove so suggestive. What were ducks in the scientist's world before the revolution are rabbits afterwards. The man who first saw the exterior of the box from above later sees its interior from below. Transformations like these, though usually more gradual and almost always irreversible, are common concomitants of scientific training. Looking at a contour map, the student sees lines on paper, the cartographer a picture of a terrain. Looking at a bubble-chamber photograph, the student sees confused and broken lines, the physicist a record of familiar subnuclear events.
>
> (Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 111.)

Once the student has learned to 'see' like the scientist, he becomes an inhabitant of the scientist's world. According to Kuhn, this world "is not ... fixed once and for all by the nature of the environment, on the one hand, and of science, on the other." Instead, "it is determined jointly by the environment and the particular normal-scientific tradition that the student has been trained to pursue."[35]

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[34]The reader may have noticed that there is an unmistakable echo of Quine's views concerning the 'meaning' of observation terms and statements in this approach to the meaning of scientific terms.
[35]Kuhn, *op. cit.*, p. 112. To demonstrate the point, Kuhn lists several examples from the history of science. *ibid.*, pp. 115-7 (astronomy), 117-8 (electricity), 118 (chemistry), 118-20 (dynamics).

If observation is thus theory-dependent, then there is at least one obvious way in which meaning is also theory-dependent. If what we see is influenced by theory, then what we say in response to our sense experience is also theory-dependent.[36]

> At one time a certain set of sense experiences are associated with a certain word, in the sense that their occurrence is generally taken to warrant the word's application [whether it be a theoretical or observational term]. But then we discover by reference to our theories that those experiences do not warrant the word's application after all, that they can well occur in cases where the word is not applicable.
>
> (Papineau, *Theory and Meaning*, p. 26.)

Theory-Dependence and Conceptual Change.

If we grant that philosophers like Kuhn and Feyerabend are correct in thinking that meaning is theory-dependent in this way, how is this to help them defend the scheme-content distinction? Kuhn argues that a change in theory ("paradigm") involves "a displacement of the conceptual network through which scientists view the world."[37] That is, a change in theory is a change in conceptual scheme. If meaning is theory-dependent, then a change in theory will also involve a change in meaning. It could then be argued that a change in meaning could serve as evidence for a change in conceptual scheme.

As we have seen, this change in meaning is of a special sort:

> We must not describe this change [in meaning] simply as a matter of ... [scientists] coming to view old falsehoods as truths, for a truth is a proposition, and what they come to accept, in accepting a sentence as true, is not the same thing that they rejected when formerly they held the sentence to be false. A change has come over the meaning of the sentence because it now belongs to a new language.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 188.)

Since theory influences observation, a change in theory brings about a change in observation. "Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important[ly], during [scientific] revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before."[38] Seeing the world anew leads to a new association of terms (theoretical and observational) and sensations. This change in association produces a new *language* because both the associations *and* the sensory experiences themselves

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[36]Papineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-8.
[37]Kuhn, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[38]*ibid.*, p. 111.

are shaped by a new theory. The new view does not simply reject and replace old associations, but rather associates language anew with a different reality. While old falsehoods may appear to be now held true (and vice versa), things are not so simple. Scientific vocabulary may remain largely unchanged from one theory to the next, but the different physical referents and verification conditions assigned to those terms by various theories mean that while vocabulary may stay much the same, meaning does not.[39]

Now we may have a formula for generating distinct conceptual schemes:

> We get a new out of an old scheme when the speakers of a language come to accept as true an important range of sentences they previously took to be false (and, of course, vice versa).
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 188.)

and this change must not simply involve a redistribution of truth values, but a change of meaning.[40]

Davidson's Argument.

> [T]he present question is ... whether, if such changes [in meaning] were to take place, we should be justified in calling them alterations in the basic conceptual apparatus.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 188.)

We have already seen that Davidson accepts that language change is a necessary condition for change in conceptual scheme (if we accept the scheme-content dualism).[41] However, for a change in language to serve as clear evidence for a change in conceptual scheme, it must not only be a necessary condition, but also a sufficient condition for conceptual change. Davidson gives an example to illustrate the point:

> Suppose that in my office as Minister of Scientific Language I want the new man to stop using words that refer, say, to emotions, feelings, thoughts, and intentions, and to talk instead of the physiological states and happenings that are assumed to be more or less identical with the mental riff and raff. How do I tell whether my advice has been heeded if the new man speaks a new language? For all I know, the shiny new phrases, though stolen from the old language in which they refer to physiological stirrings, may in his mouth play the role of the messy old mental concepts.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, pp. 188-9.)

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[39]See footnote 26 above for references.
[40]Davidson, OVICS, pp. 187-8.
[41]See section 2.2 above.

If language change is not a sufficient condition for conceptual change, then (as in this case) language may change while conceptual scheme does not. Therefore, language change will not serve to identify change in conceptual scheme.

But if the schemer rises to this challenge, and claims that language change is both a necessary *and* a sufficient condition for conceptual change, he will discover that he then has troubles elsewhere. If language change is a sufficient condition of conceptual change, then every time the former occurs, so does the latter. But if every change in meaning is paralleled by a change in concepts, then, for the schemer to be consistent, she must insist that translatability between languages is, in principle, impossible.

To illustrate why, we may consider the following. Take two languages, L_1 and L_2, and two conceptual schemes, C_1 and C_2. Let L_1 be associated with C_1 ,and L_2 with C_2. As we have seen, L_1 and L_2 must not be translatable into one another. If they were, then C_1 and C_2 were be comparable via these translations. And if conceptual schemes are comparable, their explanatory force is lost. Now, according to the schemer's position in the last paragraph, all change in language may be associated with a change in conceptual scheme. So each language is associated with a different conceptual scheme. Therefore, there must be no translatability between languages, for if there were, conceptual schemes would be comparable, and so unexplanatory.

The schemer may be prepared to bite the bullet here. Because of the special meaning she assigns to 'language', she is not committed to the obvious falsity that French cannot be translated into English, or Arabic into German.[42] When she talks about 'language', she does not mean French, or German, Arabic or English. She holds that meaning is theory-dependent, and so that when theory changes, so does meaning. So, according to her, two speakers speak the same language if and only if the meaning of their words are determined by the same theory. Therefore, a French and an English speaker who hold the same theory speak the same language.

But the schemer's position is still an uncomfortable one, and for two reasons. Firstly, it is often argued that the theory-dependence account of meaning implies an unpalatable relativism.[43] If the meaning of theoretical and observational terms are determined by theory, then different theories cannot be compared in order to determine which is superior (which one is more consistent with the empirical data). Since each theory interprets and shapes the data in its own way, there is no common ground between them, which we can refer to in order to make judgements about

[42]Peter Hacker has stated that the schemer is committed to this obvious falsity. Hacker, "On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", pp.297-8.
[43]See Papineau, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

which is better. If both theoretical and observable entities are relative to theory, then all objectivity in the sciences is lost, and "it would seem impossible for a scientist ever to be rationally compelled to admit that the views of his opponents are preferable to his own."[44]

Nonetheless, the schemer may well still be prepared to bite the bullet and accept this relativism (as, for example, Feyerabend is[45]). So now we may turn to the second reason for the schemer's position being an uncomfortable one. Consider again Davidson's claim about the man who stops talking about "the mental riff and raff", and instead talks of "physiological states and happenings". According to Davidson, "[f]or all I know, the shiny new phrases ... may play the role of the messy old mental concepts."[46] He goes on to say

> The key phrase here is: for all I know. What is clear is that retention of some or all of the old vocabulary in itself provides no basis for judging the new scheme to be the same as, or different from, the old.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 189.)

The schemer, as we know, must insist that language change is a sufficient condition for conceptual change. In Davidson's example, the man changes theory—i.e. he holds certain sentences false which he previously held to be true. Some sentences, once held true, containing the terms 'belief', 'intention', 'feeling', and 'emotion', are now held to be false. Some sentences, once held false, containing physiological terms are now held true. And these changes have come about as a result of a change in the meaning in mental and physiological terms. In this case, then, both theory and language change. Even so, it is still possible that the conceptual apparatus at work does not change. And if language can change without conceptual scheme changing, then language change is not a sufficient condition for conceptual change (or at least we have no evidence that it is).

The schemer may respond with the following argument. Theory change is a necessary condition for language change (of the sort we are talking about).[47] And theory change is a sufficient condition for conceptual change. So, if language changes, then theory must also have changed. And if theory changes, then conceptual scheme must change. Therefore, language change is a sufficient condition for conceptual change.

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[44]*ibid.*, p. 41.
[45]Feyerabend, *Against Method*, especially chs. 1, 5, 11, 18-20. Kuhn, on the other hand, later distanced himself from these relativist conclusions. See, for example, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-7.
[46]Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
[47]Indeed, it may be a necessary and a sufficient condition.

This argument, too, will fall foul of Davidson's example. Davidson's example has shown not only that language change cannot be sufficient for conceptual change, but also that theory change cannot be sufficient for conceptual change (the latter is the second premise of the schemer's argument in the last paragraph). The man in the example changes his theory, but it is still possible for him to use the same "messy old mental concepts". Therefore, it is possible to change theory without changing conceptual scheme. So, in contradiction of the schemer's claims, theory change is not sufficient for conceptual change.

Conclusion.

The Kuhnian argument presented by the schemer was that since (1) theory change signalled conceptual change, and (2) meaning change (of a certain sort) signalled theory change, then (3) meaning change (of a certain sort) would signal (or serve as evidence for) conceptual change. Davidson's example of the man who stops talking about the mental riff and raff, and instead talks about physiological stirrings, is supposed to demonstrate that it is possible for both theory and meaning change to occur without there being any change in conceptual scheme. This is possible because theory change does not necessarily signal conceptual change. One can change the theory, and hence change meaning or language, without change in conceptual apparatus. Thus it does not follow that meaning change will serve as evidence for conceptual change. So, even if we could identify non-translatable languages by reference to their relation with theory, they would not serve as evidence for conceptual difference.

2.4.2. Empirical Content and Non-Translatable Languages.

Introduction.

Meaning variance was supposed to overcome Davidson's paradox by making no claims about the source of content at all. For Kuhn and Feyerabend all that was needed to identify alternative conceptual schemes was the ability to identify a certain type of change in language. This approach was to avoid Davidson's paradox by giving a criterion for identity of conceptual schemes which did not demand any knowledge of the common thing which different schemes organised or structured.

However, as demonstrated in the last section, this approach failed because change in language was not enough to ensure change in conceptual scheme. Therefore change in language could not serve as a criterion for identity of conceptual schemes.

Having thus disposed of meaning variance as a method for supporting conceptual relativism, Davidson considers an alternative approach. This time it is not language on its own that will serve to identify conceptual difference, but the relation between language and experience.

> The idea is that something is a language, and associated with a conceptual scheme, whether we can translate it or not, if it stands in a certain relation ... with experience. The problem is to say what the relation is, and to be clearer about the entities related.
>
> The images and metaphors fall into two main groups: conceptual schemes (languages) either *organize* something, or they *fit* it ... The first group contains also *systematize*, *divide up* (the stream of experience); further examples of the second group are *predict*, *account for*, *face* (the tribunal of experience).
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 191.)[48]

Differing relations of language to experience are supposed to signal conceptual difference for the following reasons. If, with Quine, we endorse a new holistic empiricism (see 1.3), we know that theory is underdetermined by experience. There are many ways in which empirical content can be distributed through our theories and language, and that our choices about which distribution to endorse are governed by pragmatic concerns.[49]

Quine suggests in "Two Dogmas" that some such pragmatic concerns may influence what conceptual scheme is like:

> The issue over there being classes seems more a question of convenient conceptual scheme; the issue over there being centaurs, or brick houses on Elm Street, seems more a question of fact. But I have urged that this differences is only one of degree, and that it turns upon our vaguely pragmatic inclination to adjust one strand of the fabric of science rather than another in accommodating some particular recalcitrant experience.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 46.)

Thus the statements that are close to the centre of our web of belief determine the basic conceptual tools we employ in language. And, of course, what statements we have at or near the centre of our web is a matter of pragmatic decision.

Quine continues in a similar vein in *Word and Object*.

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[48]For examples of both metaphors see Davidson, OVICS, pp. 190-1. References are made to Benjamin Whorf, Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Quine.
[49]Quine, "Two Dogmas", pp. 42-6.

We cannot strip away the conceptual trappings sentence by sentence and leave a description of the objective world; but we can investigate the world, and man as a part of it, and thus find out what cues he could have of what goes on around him. Subtracting his cues from his world view, we get man's net contribution as the difference. This difference marks the extent of man's conceptual sovereignty—the domain within which he can revise theory while saving the data.

(Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 5.)

Man can change theory while saving the data by deciding what statements are to be placed centrally in the web and what statements are to be at the periphery. In making different choices concerning the structure of his theory, he can alter conceptual scheme and how scheme and empirical content relate, and thus he alters his world view. How language relates to ('organises' or 'fits') experience is thus determined by these pragmatic decisions.

We can then make sense of there being alternative conceptual schemes by imagining that others may make radically different decisions concerning the shape of their theory than we have done. Thus, while their theory would still either organise or fit experience, the inner workings which allow it to do so would be radically different than ours. And we could identify alternative schemes if we could tell that a language organised or fitted experience without being able to translate that language. But Davidson argues that we cannot determine that a language organises or fits experience without being able to translate it, and thus we cannot identify non-translatable languages (and thus associated schemes) by investigation of their relation with experience.

First, then, I will examine why investigation of how language organises experience will not serve to identify alternative conceptual schemes.

Organising.

To talk of language organising is to talk of its referential apparatus.[50] Language organises experience by distributing empirical content using its singular terms, predicates, and quantifiers. What these logical types refer to or quantify over are the 'posits' of theory.

Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries—not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, with the gods of Homer... The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has

[50]Davidson, OVICS, pp. 192-3.

proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a managable structure into the flux of experience.

(Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 44.)[51]

Our pragmatic decisions about the structure of theory are implemented by positing physical (and other) objects via the referential apparatus of our language. The way to identify alternative conceptual schemes then is by investigation of the referential apparatus of their associated languages. However, Davidson argues that such an investigation is only possible between translatable languages, and thus we cannot study languages that are associated with schemes other than our own, since they must be non-translatable. Therefore investigation of how language organises experience cannot serve as a criterion for identifying non-translatable languages or alternative schemes.

A language may contain simple predicates whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates, or even by any predicates at all, in some other language. What enables us to make this point in particular cases is an ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects.

(Davidson, OVICS, p. 192.)

We can make sense of languages other than our own in which the reference of singular terms and the extension of predicates differs from ours. But this difference in extension does not mark a difference in conceptual scheme. While we may determine that other languages refer to, group and relate objects in different ways than we do, this all presupposes that our respective languages by and large quantify over the same objects. For languages that quantify over different objects there is obviously more than a difference in extension at stake. The question is whether we can make sense of this difference without translation. The answer, according to Davidson, is no.

What allows comparison of extension between two languages is a shared set of concepts, which "individuate the same objects". But with two languages that are associated with different schemes, there cannot be anything in common. If there was, then the languages would be translatable by reference to this common thing (whatever it might be). And without anything in common, comparison of quantification or ontology is impossible. Thus we cannot make sense of how languages differ in ontological commitment without there being something that both languages share against which we could understand the difference. And if such languages did share something, they would then be (to some extent) translatable, so we cannot make sense of difference in quantification or ontological commitment without translation. Thus,

[51]It is evident from this quote that the two metaphors of organising and fitting are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

comparison of referential apparatus will not serve to identify non-translatable languages and so will not yield evidence for alternative conceptual schemes.

Fitting.

There is, however, another method for identifying non-translatable languages that may be salvaged from Quine. Returning to a quote from "Two Dogmas" given above:

> Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries—not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, with the gods of Homer... The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a managable structure into the flux of experience.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 44.)

we can see what this other option is. The aim of a theory and its associated language(s) is primarily to "work a managable structure into the flux of experience." This can be done in any way we choose, as long as our theory 'fits' with experience—i.e. as long as the empirical implications of our theory agree with experience. In short, our theory must be "borne out by the evidence".[52] Of course, a theory may be borne out by the available evidence and yet be false.[53] This being the case, a theory is true only if it is borne out by "the totality of possible sensory evidence past, present, and future".[54]

> We do not need to pause to contemplate what this [i.e. fitting "the totality of possible sensory evidence"] might mean. The point is that for a theory to fit or face up to the totality of possible sensory evidence is for that theory to be true. If a theory quantifies over physical objects, numbers, or sets, what it says about these entities is true provided the theory as a whole fits the sensory evidence. One can see how, from this point of view, such entities might be called posits. It is reasonable to call something a posit if it can be contrasted with something that is not. Here the something that is not is sensory evidence—at least that is the idea.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 193.)

Now it looks like we can make sense of a language quantifying over different objects (etc.) than our own language without an appeal to translation. If we can determine whether a theory and associated language fits the totality of possible

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[52]Davidson, OVICS, p. 193.
[53]*ibid.*, p. 193.
[54]*ibid.*, p. 193.

sensory evidence without an appeal to translation, then we may identify a non-translatable language, and thus identify an alternative conceptual scheme. We may be able to do so by investigation of a speaker's behaviour under different sensory stimulations.[55] But again Davidson argues that to determine whether a theory and associated language fit with the evidence requires translation.

The argument is as follows. Firstly, it is argued that

> [t]he trouble with the notion of fitting the totality of experience, like the notion of fitting the facts, or of being true to the facts, adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, pp. 193-4.)

This being the case,

> [o]ur attempt to characterize languages or conceptual schemes in terms of the notion of fitting some entity has come down, then, to the simple thought that something is an acceptable conceptual scheme or theory if it is true. Perhaps we better say *largely* true in order to allow sharers of a scheme to differ on details.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 194.)

So,

> the criterion of a conceptual scheme different from our own now becomes: largely true but not translatable. The question whether this is a useful criterion is just the question how well we understand the notion of truth, as applied to language, independent of the notion of translation.
>
> (Davidson, OVICS, p. 194.)

Davidson maintains that we do not understand the notion truth (as applied to languages) independently of translation at all. And since we do not, it follows that the criterion of a conceptual scheme different from our own given by the fitting metaphor (i.e. "largely true but not translatable") is not at all useful.

To defend this argument, one must show that the notion of fitting adds nothing to the simple concept of being true, and that we do not understand the notion of truth (as applied to language) independent of translation. I will take each point in turn.

Firstly,

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[55]Quine, *Word and Object*, pp. 26-79.

The trouble is that the notion of fitting the totality of experience, like the notion of fitting the facts, or of being true to the facts, adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true.

(Davidson, OVICS, p. 195.)

The notion of 'being true to the facts' is thought to add nothing new to the simple concept of being true because it is considered by many to be either trivial or empty.[56]

The notion is trivial in as much as it tells us that a sentence is true if it corresponds to the facts. Few would deny that true sentences agree with the facts, and the claim is so uncontroversial because it says little or nothing about how sentences are true or false. To be offered a sentences like

(1) The statement that Dublin is in Ireland corresponds to the facts

as an explanation of

(2) The statement that Dublin is in Ireland is true

is to be offered nothing. (1) does not explain (2), but only rephrases it. This overly general version of 'fitting' or 'corresponding to' the facts adds nothing to the concept of being true.[57]

For a sentence like (1) to explain what makes our statements true or false, it must bring with it an account of facts and correspondence that does not circle back immediately to truth.[58] What we are looking for here is a correspondence relation between true statements and particular facts. Then an explanation of (2) would be of the form

(3) The statement that Dublin is in Ireland corresponds to the fact that Dublin is in Ireland.

Generalising the strategy, we get

(4) A statement that p is true if it corresponds to a fact that q.

As we have seen in (3), (4) holds when 'p' and 'q' are replaced by the same sentence. However, according to Davidson, "after that the difficulties set in".[59]

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[56]Davidson, "True to the Facts", p. 37.
[57]*ibid.*, p. 41.
[58] *ibid.*, p. 41.
[59]*ibid.*, p. 41.

He argues that any attempt to construct an ontology of facts corresponding to true statements will either result in ontological collapse, and hence triviality, or an individuation of facts that circles back immediately to truth. Thus the problems of 'correspondence to the facts' recur on an attempt to make sense of 'correspondence to the fact that'.[60]

Since we are concerned with fitting *experience*, the details of Davidson's arguments against facts are not to the point here.[61] What we *are* to concern ourselves with is the moral. If the totality of sensory evidence is all the evidence there is, then the notion of 'fitting the totality of sensory evidence' is trivial in the same way that 'fitting the facts' is trivial. A true sentence or theory will fit all possible evidence (sensory or otherwise) by virtue of the fact that it is true. But knowing that a true statement fits all possible evidence tells us no more than does knowing that a true sentence corresponds to or fits the facts. Thus, it adds nothing to the concept of being true.

In terms of experience, any attempt to be more specific, and hence less trivial, seems nonsensical. As Davidson points out, experience is not a thing that makes statements and theories true. Rather it is that experience takes a certain course (among other things) that makes statements and theories true. "To speak of sensory experience rather than evidence ... expresses a view about the source or nature of evidence, but it does not add a new entity to the universe against which to test conceptual schemes".[62] And, as we have seen, to say that a sentence or theory 'fits' with the course taken by (all possible) experience is to say nothing more than that it is true.

So it seems that the notion of fitting the totality of sensory experience does not add anything to the simple concept of being true. Indeed, Quine is prepared to grant as much.

> There is nothing to add to Tarski's analysis, Davidson rightly urges, so far as the concept of truth is concerned. ... If empiricism is construed as a theory of truth, then what Davidson imputes to it as a third dogma is rightly imputed and rightly renounced.
>
> (Quine, "On the Very Idea of a Third Dogma", p. 39.)

The second of Davidson's claims to be defended was:

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[60] *ibid.*

[61] These arguments can be found in *ibid.*, pp. 41-3. It should also be noted that Davidson's argument for ontological collapse rests on what is known as the 'slingshot' argument. This argument is highly controversial, and many philosophers have attacked it as unsound. See, for example, Barwise and Perry, "Semantic innocence and uncompromising situations" and Read, "The Slingshot Argument".

[62] Davidson, OVICS, p. 194.

Our attempt to characterize languages or conceptual schemes in terms of the notion of fitting some entity has come down, then, to the simple thought that something is an acceptable conceptual scheme or theory if it is true. Perhaps we better say *largely* true in order to allow sharers of a scheme to differ on details. And the criterion of a conceptual scheme different from our own now becomes: largely true but not translatable. The question whether this is a useful criterion is just the question how well we understand the notion of truth, as applied to language, independent of the notion of translation.

(Davidson, OVICS, p. 194.)

The criterion of an alternative conceptual scheme is then as follows. A theory which is true, but whose statements are non-translatable is to serve as the identifying mark of the presence of an alternative conceptual scheme. So, to be able to identify this presence, one must be able to determine that a theory is (largely) true without being able to translation the statements of that theory. Immediately this seems like an impossible task—how are we to determine the truth value of statements if we can never know what they say? Indeed, it seems impossible even to determine the truth *conditions* of a statement which we could never translate. And conversely, if we did know the truth conditions of an assertoric statement, then it seems we would also know what it means, and thus be able to translate it.

In detailing this problem, Davidson points out that

[w]e recognize sentences like ' "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white' to be trivially true. Yet the totality of such English sentences uniquely determines the extension of the concept of truth for English.

(Davidson, OVICS, p. 194.)

Generalising this observation we get Tarski's material adequacy condition for a satisfactory theory of truth. This condition simply states that a theory of truth should have as consequences all such trivially true sentences in the language for which it is a theory of truth. That is, it must entail the correct extension of the concept of truth for the said language. This material adequacy condition is summed up in Convention-T, which states that

a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence *s* of L, a theorem of the form '*s* is true if and only if *p*' where '*s*' is replaced by a description of *s* and '*p*' by *s* itself if L is English, and by a translation of *s* into English if L is not English.

(Davidson, OVICS, p. 194.)

Thus the metalanguage in which the truth theory is expressed must contain all the expressions of the object language, or translations of these expressions. Thus it is

impossible to understand the notion of truth as applied to any language L without being able to understand L (whether directly or in translation). We cannot tell whether a theory is true, and thus fits experience, if that language is non-translatable. So, again, non-translatable languages will not serve as evidence for conceptual difference.[63]

Conclusion.

The Quinean method of identifying alternative conceptual schemes involves investigation of the relation between language and experience. According to Quine, there are numerous ways in which language and experience can be related, and what governs this relation are pragmatic considerations concerning the simplicity etc. of the theory. We may posit what we like in our theory, and associate these posits with experience as we choose, as long as doing so aids us in predicting and coping with experience. This freedom to posit what we wish within our web of belief would then explain the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes. Setting the ontology of our theory will involve employing a conceptual scheme which individuates the objects we are positing. All languages that share an ontology with ours will embody the same conceptual scheme. And languages that do not share such an ontology must then embody an alternative conceptual scheme. So we will have evidence for conceptual difference if we can determine that a language has ontological commitments different to our own, and if we can do so without any appeal to translation.

Davidson's general argument against this approach is that we *cannot* determine that a language has ontological commitments different from those of our language without an appeal to translation. Investigation of the referential apparatus of any language requires a shared ontology between our own language and the language to be investigated. Thus 'organisation' will not serve as a relation between language and experience that can supply evidence for alternative schemes. Neither can we appeal to 'fitting' for such evidence, for to determine that a theory and its associated language(s) fits with experience, we must understand the concept of truth as applied to those languages. But we cannot understand this concept without being able to translate the languages.

So, while Quine's theories of how language and experience relate may make intelligible the possibility of alternative schemes, it will not supply any evidence for there being alternative schemes.

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[63]See Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth", pp. 343-5, and "Truth and Proof", p. 64.

Having now considered Davidson's attacks on both Kuhnian and Quinean attempts to defend the scheme-content dualism, we might ask what he intended to offer in its stead. This is the topic of chapter 3.

Chapter 3

3.1. Introduction.

In "Two Dogmas" Quine not only attacks the empiricism of the Logical Positivists, but also offers an alternative "empiricism without dogmas". In OVICS Davidson does not offer an alternative to the views he attacks. However, in other work he does offer such an alternative. Section 3.2 presents this non-empiricist alternative, concentrating on the paper "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge". Section 3.3 discusses troublesome issues concerning the justifiers of belief, and presents Davidson' s non-empiricist solution to these problems. However, in section 3.4 Davidson's solution will be found wanting, and thus his alternative to empiricism will be shown to be flawed.

3.2. Davidson's Alternative.

Rejecting the Dogmas.

To understand Davidson's alternative to dogmatic empiricism, it will help to first consider what work the dogmas of empiricism do for the Positivists and for Quine. In both cases, what the dogmas do can be summed up as follows—they relate theory (language) and evidence (for the empiricist, experience). Of course, on the details of how theory and evidence are related the two methods are radically different. To treat of these details then, I will take each method in turn.

First, the method of the Positivists, which has as its centrepiece the dogmas of reductionism—i.e. the dogma of reductionism itself, and the reductionist reconstrual of analyticity. As we have seen (in 1.3), the Positivists argued that the relation between theory and evidence is a logical one. All statements could be logically reduced to a set of observation or protocol statements, which were in some way 'about' sense experience.[1] Experience serves as evidence, and specific statements are linked to confirming experiences via observation statements. To determine the empirical content of any theoretical statement simply involved 'reducing' that

[1]There was disagreement among the Positivists as to what form observation statements were to take. Nonetheless, these observation statements could be linked to other non-observational statements through the logical relation of reductionism, and thus observation statements (whatever their form) served to link experience (i.e. evidence) to theory.

statement to a set of observation statements, and thus linking the original statement to a set of confirming experiences.

Any theoretical statements that could not be linked in this way to experience were either (a) analytically true, or (b) meaningless. To tell which of the two a particular non-reducible statement is will be simple. A statement is only analytically true if it is true in virtue of logical laws, or could be reduced to a statement that is true in virtue of logical laws. So all meaningful statements were either verified by reduction to observation statements, or true in virtue of the laws of logic.

Quine, as we know, rejected this reductionism, but since he wished to remain an empiricist he needed to explain the relation between theory and evidence in another way. Davidson's claim is that he does so by appeal to the scheme-content dualism, which will itself turn out to be a dogma of empiricism.[2]

> I once wrote that Quine subscribed to what I called the dualism of scheme and content, and I suggested that accepting this dualism constituted the third dogma of empiricism. What I had in mind as the scheme was language, with its built-in ontology and theory of the world, the content being supplied by the patterned firing of neurons.
>
> (Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence", p. 69.)

Empirical content is now linked with the objective physical events that occur at the sensory surfaces of the observer. Thus evidence now takes the form of the observer's linguistic responses to these physical events. So observation statements are no longer 'about' private or public sense experiences, but are rather responses elicited by sensory stimulation. Nonetheless, experience (or sensory stimulation) is related to theory via observation statements, as it was with the Positivists. But because Quine has rejected reductionism, it is no longer clear how exactly we may determine the empirical content of a theoretical statement, and thus determine what evidence there could be to support it.

As we saw in 1.3, Quine argues that "it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement".[3] Empirical content, he insists, cannot be allocated statement by statement, but only to theory as a whole. But how empirical content is to be distributed through a theory is underdetermined by experience (or sensory stimulation), so there are various possible options. In "Two Dogmas" we are told that we can decide between various options for distributing empirical content through a theory by appealing to pragmatic considerations like simplicity and

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[2]See Davidson, OVICS, pp. 189-95, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence", p. 69, and "The Myth of the Subjective", pp. 161-3.
[3]Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 43.

conservation.[4] What ontological commitments our theories have, and what sensory stimulations are taken to confirm or infirm theoretical statements are thus purely governed by pragmatic concerns.

> The issue over there being classes seems more a question of convenient conceptual scheme; the issue over there being centaurs, or brick houses on Elm Street, seems more a question of fact. But I have been urging that this difference is only one of degree, and that it turns upon our vaguely pragmatic inclination to adjust one strand of the fabric of science rather than another in accommodating some particular recalcitrant experience.
>
> (Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 46.)

And so theory is related to evidence according to how we act on certain pragmatic considerations. What sensory stimulation serves as evidence for is determined by what conceptual scheme, and thus what theory, we hold. The relation between theory and evidence then becomes a relation between scheme and content. Epistemology then becomes a psychological study of how humans "deliver as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history" from the "meagre input" of certain neuron firings.[5]

Rejecting Empiricism.

In rejecting the above 'dogmas' then, one must also reject the relation between theory and evidence that they each propound. Thus, when Quine rejected the first two dogmas, he rejected the associated relation between theory and evidence, and offered a new one in its stead. It seems that any empiricist who wishes to attack Quine, and the third dogma of empiricism, will have to do likewise. This, however, is not Davidson's tactic. He tells us that the scheme-content dualism is not only the third, but "perhaps the last" dogma of empiricism, "for if we give it up it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism."[6]

Whether he is justified in making this claim or not, it at least signals his intent not to offer a new 'empiricism without dogmas', but instead to turn his back on empiricism altogether. Empiricism comes in numerous forms, as Davidson is well aware, but he takes it that an empiricist is at least committed

> not only to the pallid claim that all knowledge of the world comes through the agency of the senses, but also the conviction that this fact is of prime epistemological significance. The pallid idea merely

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[4] *ibid.*, p. 46.
[5] Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized", p. 83.
[6] Davidson, OVICS, p. 189.

recognizes the obvious causal role of the senses in mediating between objects and events in the world and our thoughts and talk about them; empiricism locates the ultimate evidence for those thoughts at this intermediate step.

(Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence", pp. 68-9.)

It is this claim of "epistemological significance" that Davidson is turning his back on. That is, he rejects the claim that *experience* can serve as *evidence* for theory, or, to put it another way, that the senses can justify beliefs.[7]

Davidson's attack on what he calls 'the third dogma' is one part of his flight from empiricism. Those who hold to the scheme-content dualism are forced to deny any direct knowledge of what is the source of evidence—i.e. the world, nature, experience, sense data, the given etc. (see 2.2 above). Therefore, they are forced to produce a method for identifying conceptual difference that does not make use or reference to such direct knowledge. That is, the method they offer for identifying conceptual difference must not 'interpret' or schematise the source of content, the common system on which all points of view are plotted.[8] But in order to demonstrate that different conceptual schemes give form to the same content, this method must still acknowledge this common system as the source of evidence. So, in Quine's case for example, we are told that conceptual scheme 'fits' experience, that is it agrees with experience. But experience is not conceptualised, it is not 'interpreted'—for observation statements are "*about* physical objects and not sense experience".[9] Experience never crosses the "periphery" of theory, but as theory is forced to fit it, it still serves as the source of evidence.

Davidson's attack on the scheme-content dualism consists of arguments for the claim that the schemers' various strategies for identifying conceptual difference without 'interpreting' the 'common system' all fail. If we accept these arguments (I have to some extent attempted to defend them in 2.2-2.4 above), then it seems we must reject the scheme-content dualism as a dogma of empiricism. However, it is unclear why these arguments should force us to give up empiricism altogether. Davidson of course contends that the third dogma of empiricism is also the final dogma, but he does not spell out his reasons in OVICS. He does, however, offer a separate set of reasons why any type of empiricism will have problems explaining how senses are to justify belief.

How, then, might sensation justify belief?

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[7]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 312.
[8]Davidson, OVICS, p. 184.
[9]Quine, "Two Dogmas", p. 43.

The simplest idea is to identify certain beliefs with sensations. Thus Hume seems not to have distinguished between perceiving a green spot and perceiving that a spot is green.

(Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 310.)

But beliefs have propositional content, and sensation does not—thus we cannot identify certain beliefs with sensations.

A more plausible approach, which avoids this problem, is to claim that we have beliefs *about* sensations—e.g. 'I believe that this spot is green'—and that these beliefs, because of their special character, require no justification.[10] There is, however, at least one problem with this approach. That is, if we had sensations without their associated self-justifying beliefs, we would not have justified belief.

Emphasis on sensation or perception in matters epistemological springs from the obvious thought: sensations are what connect the world and our beliefs, and they are candidates for justifiers because we are often aware of them. The trouble ... is that the justification seems to depend on the awareness, which is just another belief.

(Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 311.)

What we have then is belief, and not sensation, justifying belief.[11]

We have already seen what Davidson's solution to these problems is going to be—reject the claim that the senses *do* justify beliefs. His alternative is not unlike the one just mentioned—i.e. that belief justifies belief.

Davidson's Alternative.

In "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" Davidson argues for a form of coherence theory of knowledge.

My coherence theory concerns beliefs, or sentences held true by someone who understands them. ... Beliefs for me are states of people with intentions, desires, sense organs; they are states that are caused by, and cause, events inside and outside the bodies of their entertainers. But even given all these constraints, there are many things people do believe, and many more that they could. For all such cases, the coherence theory applies.

(Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 308.)

Davidson claims that

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[10]Davidson gives an example of one such approach, in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 311.

[11]*ibid.*, p. 311.

there is a presumption in favor of the truth of a belief that coheres with a significant mass of belief. Every belief in a coherent total set of beliefs is justified in the light of this presumption. ... This conclusion, though too vague and hasty to be right, contains an important core of truth.

(Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 308.)

Davidson attempts to build on this "core of truth" by appeal to the nature of belief and belief attribution. We will see how this construction goes in the second half of 3.3. But before that we must turn our attention to one of the most difficult and pressing problems faced both by the empiricist, and by Davidson' coherence theory of knowledge—that of global scepticism.

3.3. The Sceptical Problem.

The Sceptical Problem.

What justifies the belief that our senses do not systematically deceive us? For even if sensations justify belief in sensation, we do not yet see how they justify belief in external events and objects?

(Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 311.)

The worry behind this question is an old one, most famously expressed by Descartes in the *Meditations*. The problem is that even if the senses could serve as justifiers for belief in sensation, there is no guarantee that sensation resembles the external world that causes it. As Descartes pointed out, it is possible that our senses deceive us about the nature of the external world. Our sensations of green spots, of tables and chairs, or of trees and animals may not be caused by green things, or tables, chairs, trees or animals but rather by an evil demon who is systematically trying to deceive us.[12] Whatever about the actual existence of such a malicious being, the point Descartes is making is that our sensation could be exactly as it is (i.e. apparently of a world of chairs, trees, etc.), but the causes of these sensations not be the external world as we take it to be represented through the senses. We can't see the evil demon, but it is him who is causing us to see chair and trees—therefore even if our senses were of the correct form to justify our beliefs in sensations (whatever that form may be), they would still not serve to justify our beliefs about an objective external world.

This form of scepticism about the external world is especially pressing for the empiricist, since she claims that much if not all our knowledge comes via the senses.

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[12]Descartes' famous evil demon thesis is offered in the "First Meditation".

So, if it is possible that the senses are lying to us, then it looks like we cannot justify any information that we receive from the senses. Thus while the senses may supply us with true belief, the sceptic has demonstrated that they will not justify the information they give us. And if knowledge is justified true belief, then the senses do not supply us with knowledge. Even if the senses did not lie to us, the possibility that they may be caused by something other than what they represent (e.g. if they were caused by evil demons or evil scientists) is enough to undermine their role as justifiers of belief about the external world.

The sceptic's questions do not cause the same problems for a coherence theory of knowledge, but this does not mean that the coherentist gets off scot-free. Rather, the sceptic's questions simply raise different, but analogous problems for the coherentist. Since the coherentist denies that the senses justify any beliefs, whether they be about sensation or the causes of sensation, she will not be worried by Descartes' evil demon hypothesis. Since the senses do not justify her beliefs in chairs or tables etc., it will not concern her that her senses may be lying about chairs and tables. However, the sceptic may be just as worried about the coherentist's method of justification as she is about the empiricist's, albeit for different reasons.

The coherentist holds that "nothing can count as a reason [or justification] for holding a belief except another belief."[13] More specifically, she holds that a belief is justified if it coheres with the overall set of beliefs that it is a part of. The sceptic will argue that this method of justification is no better than the empiricist's, because coherence no more guarantees the truth of beliefs than do the senses. For on the coherentist view there is nothing stopping a person holding a coherent (i.e. non-contradictory) set of beliefs, while those beliefs are largely false.

Davidson offers a way for the coherentist to proceed in the face of such sceptical problems.

> What we need to answer the skeptic is to show that someone with a (more or less) coherent set of beliefs has a reason to suppose his beliefs are not mistaken in the main. What we have shown is that it is absurd to look for a justifying ground for the totality of beliefs, something outside this totality which we can use to test or compare with our beliefs. The answer to our problems must then be to find a *reason* for supposing most of our beliefs are true that is not a form of *evidence.*
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 314.)

The problem with coherence is that in concerning itself purely with the internal workings of a set of beliefs it seems to detach itself from the world. To claim that beliefs are true in virtue of coherence seems wrongheaded. Beliefs should be true in

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[13]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 310.

virtue of their agreeing with the world, or with the causes of belief. However, in OVICS and "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" Davidson has argued that any attempt to join belief to the world via some 'uninterpreted content' will fail. Thus he insists that any attempt to 'rejoin' beliefs and their causes must not make any appeal to the notion of 'uninterpreted content' as a source of evidence. Rather, the coherentist must find a reason for supposing that a coherent set of beliefs is not largely mistaken that "is not a form of evidence". The rest of 3.3 will outline Davidson's attempt to give such a reason, and suggest that there is a problem with his approach.

Davidson's Response to the Sceptic.

> My argument has two parts. First I urge that a correct understanding of the speech, beliefs, desires, intentions and other propositional attitudes of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true, and so there is a legitimate presumption that any one of them, if it coheres with most of the rest, is true. Then I go on to claim that anyone with thoughts, and so in particular anyone who wonders whether he has any reason to suppose he is generally right about the nature of his environment, must know what a belief is, and how in general beliefs are to be detected and interpreted. These being perfectly general facts we cannot fail to use when we communicate with others, or when we try to communicate with others, or even when we merely think we are communicating with others, there is a pretty strong sense in which we can be said to know that there is a presumption in favor of the overall truthfulness of anyone's beliefs, including my own. So it is bootless for someone to ask for some *further* reassurance; that can only add to his stock of beliefs. All that is needed is that he recognize that belief is in its nature veridical.
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 314.)

Of the two steps in this argument, I will concentrate on the first—i.e. "I urge that a correct understanding of the speech, beliefs, desires, intentions and other propositional attitudes of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true, and so there is a legitimate presumption that any one of them, if it coheres with most of the rest, is true." It is with this claim that Davidson attempts to establish the "reason" that is not "evidence".

Davidson's views on what is involved in the "correct understanding" of the speech and propositional attitudes of a person are spelt out in his work on 'radical interpretation'. How exactly the conclusion that "most of a person's beliefs must be true" follows from his views on radical interpretation is what will concern us in the next (quite a) few pages.

Radical Interpretation and the Sceptic.

In his work on radical interpretation Davidson is primarily concerned with certain characteristics or abilities that a theory of meaning (interpretation) must have. He sums up these characteristics in the "Introduction" to *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*:

> What is it for words to mean what they do? In the essays collected here I explore the idea that we would have an answer to this question if we knew how to construct a theory satisfying two demands: it would provide an interpretation of all utterances, actual and potential, of a speaker or group of speakers; and it would be verifiable without knowledge of the detailed propositional attitudes of the speaker.
>
> (Davidson, "Introduction", p. xiii.)

The first demand or constraint on a theory of meaning can be further developed by recognition of two fairly obvious features of languages—first, that they are learnable, and second that an infinite amount of novel sentences could be constructed in most languages. Taking these two features together suggests that "a satisfactory theory must discover a finite basic vocabulary in the verbal phenomena to be interpreted if it is to prove useful to a creature with finite powers."[14] Languages (or at least most) 'contain' an infinite amount of sentences. However, for a "creature with finite powers" to be able to learn such languages, she cannot learn the meaning of each sentence one by one. Rather, she must learn a finite vocabulary and a grammar (i.e. rules for constructing sentences by joining together words from this finite vocabulary). Thus, a theory of meaning must be able to explain how "the semantic features of the potential infinity of sentences" are owed "to the semantic features of the items in a finite vocabulary".[15]

So, not only must a theory of meaning provide "an interpretation of all utterances, actual and potential, of a speaker or group of speakers", but these interpretations must result from an investigation of the semantic features of the 'parts' of the interpreted sentences. That is, the theory of meaning must explain how the meaning of sentences depends on the meaning of their parts (whatever 'meaning' signifies here).

Davidson applauds Frege's attempt to meet this constraint by giving a *recursive* account of how the meaning of sentences depends on the meaning of their

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[14]Davidson, "Introduction", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p. xiii. See also "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages", in the same volume, pp. 3-15, and "Truth and Meaning", p. 17.
[15]Davidson, "Introduction", p. xiii.

parts.[16] Frege's insight was to realise that "a satisfactory theory of the meanings of complex expressions may not require entities as meanings of all the parts" of those expressions.[17] Rather, a theory could be constructed in which sub-sentential terms like predicates (for example) were not thought to refer to an entity, but rather serve a functional role in sentences. It could be said that these functions map the entities referred to by names onto other entities. Taking Frege's insight into consideration, then, the first constraint on a theory of meaning can be rephrased "so as not to suggest that individual words must have meanings at all, in any sense that transcends the fact that they have a systematic effect on the meanings of the sentences in which they occur."[18]

There is, however, a problem with the recursive Fregean theory as it is presented above. In this theory, names refer to objects or entities, and other sub-sentential parts map these entities onto other entities. The meaning of names is then identified with their reference. But, as Frege was aware, reference and meaning do not always coincide. The famous Fregean example is of the two names 'Morning Star' and 'Evening Star'. Both refer to the same entity (i.e. Venus), but they clearly do not have the same meaning. As a result, sentences that contain them do not have the same meaning. For example, the sentence

(1) Morning Star = Evening Star

does not mean the same as

(2) Morning Star = Morning Star.

Frege's solution to this problem was to introduce a distinction between sense (meaning) and reference. However, Davidson insists at this point that

> the switch from reference to meaning leads to no useful account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of the words (or other structural features) that compose them.
>
> (Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 20.)

The problem is that Frege's insight is lost. According to Davidson, on the introduction of sense as opposed to reference, Frege's account of how the meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of its parts becomes a bogus one.

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[16]Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", pp. 17-20.
[17]*ibid.*, p. 18.
[18]*ibid.*, p. 18.

Ask, for example, for the meaning of 'Theaetetus flies'. A Fregean answer might go something like this: given the meaning of 'Theatetus' as argument, the meaning of 'flies' yields the meaning of 'Theaetetus flies' as value. The vacuity of this answer is obvious. We wanted to know what the meaning of 'Theaetetus flies' is; it is no progress to be told that it is the meaning of 'Theatetus flies'. This much we knew before any theory was in sight. In the bogus account just given, talk of the structure of the sentence and of the meanings of words was idle, for it played no role in producing the given description of the meaning of the sentence.

(Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 20.)

A real account would consist in

a theory that has as consequences all sentences of the form '*s* means *m*' where '*s*' is replaced by a structural description of a sentence and '*m*' is replaced by a singular term that refers to the meaning of that sentence; ... [moreover, this theory must provide] an effective method for arriving at the meaning of an arbitrary sentence structurally described.

(Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 20.)

Whether Davidson's criticisms of Frege are fair is not to the point here.[19] What is important is that, in the above quote, Davidson is beginning to outline what he believes is a satisfactory theory of meaning.[20]

However, Davidson is unhappy with the above formulation of a theory of meaning for the same reason he is unhappy with the Fregean theory he initially criticises. A theory that yields sentences of the form '*s* means *m*' will be uninformative as to how the parts of a sentence influence the meaning. Davidson suggests that a theory that yields sentences of the form '*s* means *m*', where '*s*' is replaced by a structural description of the 'meanings' of the parts of a sentence, and '*m*' refers to the meaning of the sentence will be trivial. The problem with the Fregean account generalises to all theories that take meanings as entities. To be told that the meaning of 'Theatetus flies' is 'Theatetus flies' is to be told nothing new, and the reference to the structure of the sentence is merely bogus handwaving.

If meanings are not to be entities, then our theory should not have as a consequence sentences of the form '*s* means *m*'. Now that we do not accept meanings as entities, the singular term '*m*' must go. Davidson initially suggests replacing '*s* means *m*' with '*s* means that *p*', where '*p*' is to be replaced by a sentence, but quickly discards this because "it is reasonable to expect that in wrestling with the logic of the apparently non-extensional 'means that' we will encounter problems as hard as, or

[19]This sentence, not unintentionally, suggests that Davidson's criticisms may not be fair.
[20]For another Davidsonian attack on meanings as entities, see "Radical Interpretation", p. 126-7.

perhaps identical with, the problems our theory is out to solve."[21] Davidson finally settles on what he calls a "simple and radical" solution.[22]

> The theory [of meaning] will have done its work if it provides, for every sentence *s* in the language under study, a matching sentence (to replace '*p*') that, in some way yet to be made clear, 'gives the meaning' of *s*. One obvious candidate for this matching sentence is just *s* itself, if the object language is contained in the metalanguage; otherwise a translation of *s* in the metalanguage. As a final bold step, let us try treating the position occupied by '*p*' extensionally: to implement this, sweep away the obscure 'means that', provide the sentence that replaces '*p*' with a proper sentential connective, and supply the description that replaces '*s*' with its own predicate. The plausible result is
>
> (T) *s* is *T* if and only if *p*.
>
> (Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 23.)

The constraint that is to be met by a theory of meaning now is that it must entail a sentence of the form (T) for every sentence in the language to be interpreted. It is claimed that this will yield an interpretation, since the sentence taking the place of '*p*' in some way 'gives the meaning of' the sentence structurally described in the position of *s*. Davidson points out that this condition "is in essence Tarski's Convention *T* that tests the adequacy of a formal semantical definition of truth", and thus "the sentences to which the predicate 'is *T*' applies will be just the true sentences of *L*" where *L* is the language for which we are constructing a theory of meaning.[23]

Convention T is Tarski's material adequacy condition for any theory of truth. That is, any acceptable definition or theory of truth must have as consequence all instances of the (T) schema. The idea behind this adequacy condition is that the truth of the (T) schema is so certain and obvious that it is proper that one should feel confident in rejecting any definition or theory of truth which is inconsistent with it. Remember that for a sentence *s*, the (T) schema takes a structural description of *s* on its left hand side, and *s* itself on its right hand side. So, taking the famous example of 'snow is white', a satisfactory theory of truth for English must have as a consequence the T-sentence

'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white.

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[21] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 22.
[22] *ibid.*, p. 22.
[23] *ibid.*, p. 23. See also "Radical Interpretation", pp. 130-1, 133-4.

Now it should be clear why the truth of the (T) schema is certain and obvious.[24]

For Tarski it was relatively straight-forward to check whether a theory of truth met this material adequacy condition. To check whether a certain T-sentence was true (i.e. whether both its left and right sides had the same truth value), one had only to ensure that the sentence on the right side of the bi-conditional was also the sentence named on the left side. In the above case we have a true bi-conditional because the right side is the sentence 'snow is white', and this sentence is named on the left hand side. But what about a sentence like

'Schnee ist weiß' is true-in-German if and only if snow is white.

Things are no longer so straightforward. The T-sentence is in English, but the truth theory is for German. So an English speaker could understand the T-sentence without knowing its truth value. Tarski solves this problem by insisting that the language in which a theory of truth is formulated must either (a) contain the expressions of the language for which we are constructing a theory, or (b) contain translations of the expressions of the language we are constructing the theory for.[25] So, in the above case, the language of the theory would not be English, but English plus a 'translation manual' of German expressions. Using this translation manual, one will learn that 'snow is white' translates 'Schnee ist weiß', and therefore the T-sentence is true.

However, this solution is not open to Davidson, since he wishes to use Tarski's material adequacy condition as a condition for a satisfactory theory of *meaning*, and not just truth. And it is clear that such a theory cannot presuppose translations of a language for which is to supply interpretations. If it did so, it would be presupposing its own conclusions.

> In Tarski's work, T-sentences are taken to be true because the right branch of the biconditional is assumed to be a translation of the sentence truth conditions for which are being given. But we cannot assume in advance that correct translation can be recognized without pre-empting the point of radical interpretation; in empirical applications, we must abandon the assumption. What I propose is to reverse the direction of explanation: assuming translation, Tarski was able to define truth; the present idea is to take truth as basic and to extract an account of translation or interpretation.
>
> (Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 134.)

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[24]See Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth", pp. 343-5, "Truth and Proof", p. 64, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages", pp. 154-7, 186-8. See also Haack, *Philosophy of Logics*, pp. 100-3.

[25]Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth", pp. 349-51.

With this "reverse of direction" comes the second constraint on a satisfactory theory of meaning.

The constraint was that the theory "would be verifiable without knowledge of the detailed propositional attitudes of the speaker."[26] It now turns out that this constraint is a special instance of a more general one—i.e. that it must be possible to tell that a theory of meaning is correct (i.e. that its T-sentences are true) without any appeal to translation. Or, as Davidson himself puts it, a theory of meaning must be verifiable "on the basis of evidence plausibly available to an interpreter with no prior knowledge of the language to be interpreted".[27] Detailed knowledge of the propositional attitudes of a speaker cannot serve as evidence by which one might verify a theory of meaning because "attribution of attitudes, at least where subtlety is required, demand a theory that must rest on much the same evidence as interpretation."[28] This Davidson refers to as the 'interdependence of belief and meaning'. The idea is simply that in attributing propositional attitudes like beliefs to a person, we listen to what she says, and especially to what we take to be her sincere assertions.

Davidson's explanation of how a theory of meaning is to meet this second constraint has already been intimated by the claim to 'reverse' the direction of explanation of a Tarskian theory of truth by discarding the assumption that we can translate the language we are constructing a theory for. Convention-T is now reformulated as follows:

> an acceptable theory of truth must entail, for every sentence *s* of the object language, a sentence of the form: *s* is true if and only if *p*, where '*p*' is replaced by any sentence that is true if and only if *s* is. Given this formulation, the theory is tested by evidence that T-sentences are simply true; we have given up the idea that we must also tell whether what replaces '*p*' translates *s*.
>
> (Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 134.)

Two obvious worries come to mind. First, how are we to tell that a T-sentence is true if we do not know that the sentence named on the left side of the bi-conditional serves as the right side of the bi-conditional? While is seems obvious that sentences of the form

'*s*' is true if and only if *s*

are true, it is not so obvious for sentences of the form

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[26]Davidson, "Introduction", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p. xiii.
[27]Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 131.
[28]*ibid.*, p. 134.

'*s*' is true if and only if *p*.

The second, and more pressing worry, is that even if we could determine whether the T-sentences were true, it seems "that there is no chance that if we demand so little of T-sentences, a theory of interpretation will emerge."[29] An example will serve to illustrate the problem. On Davidson's reformulation of Convention-T, the following would serve as an acceptable T-sentence for 'snow is white':

(1) 'Snow is white' is true if and only if grass is green.

But it is clear that 'grass is green' does not give the meaning of 'snow is white', and thus the true T-sentence for 'snow is white' does not give an interpretation of 'snow is white'.

These problems arose from not presupposing translation, and now the solution to these problems is to come from taking truth as basic. According to Davidson, the advantage of taking truth as basic is that "[t]ruth is a single property which attaches, of fails to attach, to utterances, while each utterance has its own interpretation; and truth is more apt to connect with fairly simple attitudes of speakers".[30] Taking truth as basic then should explain not only what utterances mean, but should also give some insight into the propositional attitudes of speakers. Through assigning truth conditions to sentences, we are to learn what they mean, and by taking propositional attitudes as attitudes towards the truth of particular sentences, we are to attribute beliefs, desires, etc. For example, we can explain belief in terms of holding true. If a speaker believes that *p*, then he must hold the sentence *p* to be true.

As we have seen, Davidson argues belief and meaning are interdependent, and thus we cannot assume any detailed knowledge about one in an explanation of the other. But truth can explain both meaning (truth conditions) and belief (holding true). Thus a truth theory that allows us to compare sentences held true with the truth conditions of those sentences will be both a satisfactory theory of meaning and of belief. Davidson's development of Tarski will bring us some of the way to getting the truth conditions of sentences (more on getting the rest of the way later). Holding true

is, of course, a belief, but it is a single attitude applicable to all sentences, and so does not ask us to be able to make finely discriminated distinctions among beliefs. It is an attitude an interpreter may

[29] *ibid.*, p. 134.
[30] *ibid.*, p. 134.

plausibly be taken to be able to identify before he can interpret, since he may know that a person intends to express a truth in uttering a sentences without having any idea *what* truth.

(Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 135.)

The comparison takes place when holding true is taken as evidence for the truth of T-sentences. Thus for a T-sentence:

(T) 'es regnet' is true-in-German when spoken by *x* at time *t* if and only if it is raining near *x* at *t*.

we may offer evidence of the form:

(E) Kurt belongs to the German speech community[31] and Kurt holds true 'Es regnet' on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon.[32]

As Davidson admits in numerous places, this approach closely resembles Quine's 'radical translation'.[33] Quine explained that translation was possible in a radical situation (i.e. where the translator knew nothing about the language to be translated) if the translator compared the verbal behaviour of speakers with their sensory stimuli.[34] Translation began then by determining which sensory stimuli elicit the utterances of which native sentences, and mapping those sentences onto sentences in the home language which are elicited by the same sensory stimuli.

Davidson's approach is not the same as Quine's, but the parallels are suggestive of how to understand Davidson's approach. Instead of verbal behaviour and sensory stimuli, Davidson compares sentences held true by speakers of the language to be interpreted with the conditions under which those sentences are held true. Knowing the conditions under which a speaker holds a sentence *s* to be true, we can then link *s* with a sentence in our own language held true under the same circumstances.[35] So, when our theory of meaning gives the T-sentence:

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[31]"The appeal to a speech community cuts a corner but begs no question: speakers belong to the same speech community if the same theories of interpretation work for them." Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 135.

[32]Both (T) and (E) are taken from Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

[33]See for example, Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 27, n. 12, p. 35, n. 19, and "Radical Interpretation", p. 126, n.1, p. 136, n. 16.

[34]Quine, *Word and Object*, pp. 28ff.

[35]"What he [the interpreter] must do is find out, however he can, what sentences the alien holds true in his own tongue (or better, to what degree he holds them true). The linguist then will attempt to construct a characterization of truth-for-the-alien which yields, so far as possible, a mapping of sentences held true (or false) by the alien on to sentences held true (or false) by the linguist." Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 27. See also (for example) "Radical Interpretation", pp. 134-5, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning", pp. 142, 152, "Thought and Talk", pp. 161-2, 168, and "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 315.

(T) 'es regnet' is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t.

it offers us 'it is raining' as an interpretation of 'es regnet'. It speaks in favour of this interpretation if various German speakers hold 'es regnet' true under the same circumstances that we hold 'it is raining' true—i.e. when it is raining near the speaker at the time of utterance. Thus

(E) Kurt belongs to the German speech community and Kurt holds true 'Es regnet' on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon.

serves as evidence for the truth of (T).

There is, however, a problem with Davidson's approach. As he puts it himself, "Kurt, or anyone else, may be wrong about whether it is raining near him."[36] If Kurt *is* wrong about whether it is raining near him (i.e. if he has a false belief), then he will not hold 'es regnet' true under all and only the circumstances that we hold 'it is raining' true. This will undermine the role of holding true as evidence for the truth of the T-sentences of a theory of meaning for, in this case, German. To generalise the point, if the speakers of the language to be interpreted could be wrong on a regular basis (i.e. if they had many false beliefs), then holding true does not guarantee the truth of T-sentences. For Davidson to retain holding true as evidence, then, he must show why speakers of any language could not have mostly false beliefs.

The last sentence is actually not quite right, as Davidson is quick to point out.[37] Davidson does not have to demonstrate that Kurt's beliefs are not mostly false, but only that his beliefs mostly agree with the interpreter's.[38] The problem raised by the possibility that Kurt had mostly false beliefs was that he would not hold sentences true under the right circumstances. But to ensure generally correct understanding of Kurt's words, what is needed is that he holds most sentences true under more or less the same conditions as the interpreter. It does not matter that his beliefs are mostly false, as long as they are false in the same way as the interpreter's. As long as the interpreter and Kurt are usually in agreement, then they will hold largely the same

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[36]Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 136.

[37]*ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

[38]That Kurt agrees with his interpreter does not mean that he must have all and only the beliefs the interpreter has. It is obvious that Kurt will not have had all the experiences of the interpreter (and vice versa), and thus it will be impossible for them to have exactly the same beliefs. Davidson's idea rather is to interpret Kurt as having the same beliefs as the interpreter "when plausibly possible" (*ibid.*, p. 137.)

sentences true under the same circumstances, and so holding true will serve as evidence for the truth of the T-sentences of the interpreter's theory of meaning.

This assumption of agreement is usually referred to as 'the Principle of Charity', although, ironically enough, it is not at all a charitable assumption.

> The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything.
>
> (Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 137.)

The point being that without an assumption of agreement, interpretation itself will be impossible. Davidson has argued that a theory of meaning must not presuppose translation, nor any detailed knowledge of the beliefs and other propositional attitudes of the speakers of the language to be interpreted. Translation was not to be presupposed for obvious reasons, and beliefs etc. were not to be supposed because it was claimed that detailed attribution of beliefs would rest on much the same evidence as interpretation of speech behaviour. To break into the circle of meaning and belief then, and thus be able to attribute beliefs and meanings to a speaker *at all*, one must "hold belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning".[39] The reason, then, that the Principle of Charity is a methodological necessity is that without it attribution of belief would be wholly impossible. And "since charity is not an option, but a condition of having a workable theory, it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it."[40]

Thus Davidson's claim that "correct understanding" of speech, belief and other propositional attitudes leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true. The fact is, according to Davidson, that if one thought otherwise it would be impossible to attribute belief at all.

It has been a long haul from the initial stating of Davidson's argument against the sceptic to our present position, and it is hoped that initial statement now makes some more sense in the light of the journey. Therefore, it will be useful to sum up what we have learnt from the journey.

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[39]*ibid.*, p. 137.
[40]Davidson, OVICS, p. 197.

Summary.

We began with Davidson's claim that a theory of meaning must meet two basic constraints for it to be a correct theory. The first was that it must yield an interpretation of every sentence (actual and possible) in the language with which the theory is concerned. Davidson argues that such a theory will turn out to have the form of a Tarskian theory of truth, which yields a T-sentence for every sentence in the language the theory is for. These T-sentences are to give the interpretations of the sentences of the object language.

There were some problems with testing whether T-sentences did give correct interpretations, because while Tarski could presuppose translation in order to check the truth of T-sentences, an interpreter could not do so without presupposing interpretation itself. This was the second constraint on theories of meaning—they must not presuppose any knowledge about the language for which they are a theory. For associated reasons, they could not presuppose any detailed knowledge of the beliefs or other propositional attitudes of speakers of the language which the theory was for.

Davidson's solution was to reformulate Convention-T in such a way as not to presuppose translation. Now it reads

> an acceptable theory of truth must entail, for every sentence *s* of the object language, a sentence of the form: *s* is true if and only if *p*, where '*p*' is replaced by any sentence that is true if and only if *s* is.
>
> (Davidson, "Radical Interpretation", p. 134.)

The problem with this reformulation was that Convention-T now did not guarantee that a true T-sentence for a sentence *s* would yield an interpretation for *s*. That is, while '*p*' would have the same truth value as '*s*' if the T-sentence were true, it did not need to have the same meaning.

To ensure that his reformulated Convention-T did yield interpretations, then, Davidson decided to "reverse the direction of explanation" in Tarski's account, and take truth as basic in order to extract an account of translation. Taking hints from Quine's work on radical translation, Davidson proposed to use Convention-T to explore under what conditions speakers of the language to be interpreted held certain sentences true. The theory of truth for the object language was to entail T-sentences which gave the truth conditions, and hence the meaning of the aliens' sentences. The truth of the T-sentences was to be checked by the above mentioned investigation of the conditions under which alien sentences were held true. When an alien held a sentence *s* true under the conditions assigned to that sentence by the theory as truth conditions, this was counted as evidence in favour of the theory.

However, another problem arose. If the aliens were not interpreted as having mostly true beliefs *by the lights of the interpreter*, then sentences held true would undermine rather than support the theory of meaning. For example, the interpreter might construct a theory which entailed

(T) 'es regnet' is true-in-German when uttered by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t.

If Kurt, our representative German speaker, did indeed mean 'it is raining' by 'es regnet', but he did not believe it to be raining when the interpreter did, then the evidence on which a theory was to be built would systematically mislead the interpreter. Davidson's solution was to insist that the interpreter must interpret the speaker as being in agreement with him concerning belief, or sentences held true, in most cases. Creating this Principle of Charity was justified because without it, the interpreter could never break into the circle of belief and meaning, and thus interpretation would never get off the ground in the first place. It was concluded, then, that "a correct understanding of the speech, beliefs, desire, intentions and other propositional attitudes of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true", *by the interpreter's lights*.[41]

Returning to Davidson original argument, it looks now as if it falls somewhat short. The argument was:

> a correct understanding of the speech [etc.] ... of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true, and so there is a legitimate presumption that any one of them, if it coheres with most of the rest, is true.
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 314.)

But all that Radical Interpretation shows is that a correct understanding of the speech of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs agree with the interpreter's. Since the sceptic can still insist that the interpreter could have mostly false beliefs, then it does not follow that "there is a legitimate presumption that any one [belief] ... , if it coheres with most of the rest, is true." Therefore, it seems that Davidson has been no more successful in responding to the sceptic than the empiricists whose views he rejects. However, in the next section I will argue that Davidson's rejection of Empiricism in OVICS might come to his aid against the sceptic.

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[41] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 314.

3.4. The Reason that is not Evidence.

The Omniscient Interpreter.

Davidson himself recognises that the Principle of Charity is not enough to defend his coherence theory of knowledge against global scepticism.

> It is an artefact of the interpreter's correct interpretation of a person's speech and attitudes that there is a large degree of truth and consistency in the thought and speech of an agent. But this is truth and consistency by the interpreter's standards. Why couldn't it happen that speaker and interpreter understand one another on the basis of a shared but erroneous beliefs?
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 317.)

Davidson admits that this can, and probably often does happen. But he argues that "it cannot be the rule".[42] To demonstrate why not, Davidson offers the 'Omniscient Interpreter Argument'.

> [I]magine for a moment an interpreter who is omniscient about the world, and about what does and would cause a speaker to assent to any sentence in his (potentially unlimited) repertoire. The omniscient interpreter, using the same method as the fallible interpreter, finds the fallible speaker largely consistent and correct. By his own standards, of course, but since these are objectively correct, the fallible speaker is seen to be largely correct and consistent by objective standards. We may also, if we want, let the omniscient interpreter turn his attention to the fallible interpreter of the fallible speaker. It turns out that the fallible interpreter can be wrong about some things, but not in general; and so he cannot share universal error with the agent he is interpreting. Once we agree to the general method of interpretation I have sketched, it becomes impossible correctly to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are.
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 317.)

> [I]t is plain why massive error about the world is simply unintelligible, for to suppose it intelligible is to suppose there could be an interpreter (the omniscient one) who correctly interpreted someone else as being massively mistaken, and this we have shown to be impossible.
>
> (Davidson, "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics", p. 201.)

It is impossible "correctly to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are." As we have already seen, the Principle of Charity demands that every interpreter interpret speakers as having mostly true belief, by the *interpreter's*

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[42]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 317.

lights. So it follows that no interpreter can (correctly or otherwise) hold that any person she interprets could be in massive error about things. Our worry was the 'by my lights' subclause. If the interpreter is wrong, then it seems that the Principle of Charity will lead her to pass on her mistakes to those she interprets. And if she is massively in error, she will make those she interprets massively wrong too. Of course, the interpreter thinks she is largely right about the world, and thus she takes others to be largely right about the world—but she is, in fact, largely wrong.

The obvious answer to this problem is that since no one can be interpreted as having mostly false beliefs, then it clearly follows that no one can be interpreted as interpreting using mostly false beliefs.

> We may also, if we want, let the omniscient interpreter turn his attention to the fallible interpreter of the fallible speaker. It turns out that the fallible interpreter [like everyone else] can be wrong about some things, but not in general; and so cannot share universal error with the agent he is interpreting.
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 317.)

We have finally arrived at Davidson's "*reason* ... that is not a form of *evidence*."[43] The method of correct understanding of the speech and beliefs of a person (i.e. Radical Interpretation) demands that we all take the beliefs of others as being mostly true. And not only this, when others interpret us, they must do the same (to realise this will be as important as to realise that massive error is unintelligible—more of this later). The reason Davidson needs in support of his coherence theory is that as interpreters are *aware* (we *know*) that massive error is thus unintelligible. That we do know this is argued for by Davidson as follows:

> [A]nyone with thoughts, and so in particular anyone who wonders whether he has any reason to suppose he is generally right about the nature of his environment, must know what a belief is, and how in general beliefs are to be detected and interpreted.
>
> (Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 314.)

And if he knows what a belief is, and how they are attributed, detected and interpreted, then he must know that attribution of mostly false beliefs to anyone is unintelligible. Thus he has reason not only to think that a belief that coheres with a large set of beliefs is likely to be true, but also that this reason will serve as a justifier for taking most of the beliefs in such a system of beliefs to be true. Thus the fact that his own belief system is coherent serves as justification for taking most of those beliefs to be true. Of course, some of his beliefs will (most likely) be false, but the

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[43] *ibid.*, p. 314.

fact that "there is a presumption in favor of the truth of a belief that coheres with a significant mass of belief" justifies, to an extent, every belief in that total set of beliefs.[44] The extent to which beliefs are justified by this fact is determined by the way believers deal with the disagreements they have with other interpreters. To understand this a little better, we can return to a point made earlier concerning the importance of how others interpret us.

Imagine a community which comprises of three speakers / believers / interpreters—call them I_1, I_2 and I_3. Each interpreter knows all about Davidson and his Principle of Charity, and thus takes the coherence of her beliefs as justification of their truth. Imagine then that I_1 and I_2 both interpret I_3. Could it be possible, with all we have seen so far, that I_1 could attribute to I_3 a system of beliefs that was radically different than the system of beliefs I_2 attributes to I_3? Initially, it might seem so, since both interpreters could apply the Principle of Charity, and thus interpret I_3 as agreeing with them, while they themselves held radically different sets of beliefs. If this were so, it looks like the interpreter's beliefs are not justified by his knowledge of radical interpretation.

However, it can be demonstrated that by appeal to the omniscient interpreter argument that such differences in attribution are unintelligible. It is impossible for any interpreter in our community to make intelligible the possibility that another interpreter could be interpreting the third member of the community in a radically different way. Thus an interpreter is not only justified in thinking that those he interprets as having coherent sets of beliefs have mostly true beliefs by his lights and that since massive error is impossible, so his own beliefs must be mostly true, but also in thinking that other interpreters will interpret him and all other members of the interpretation community correctly. Of course, there will be disagreement between interpreters over the truth of particular beliefs, and through interpretation these disagreements can be understood and discussed. But the common method of interpretation makes radical difference of belief impossible between interpreters.

The unintelligibility of such radical difference speaks for Davidson's coherence theory as an alternative to the scheme-content dualism, and its reliance on uninterpreted content. Davidson argued, as we saw in 2.2, that those who hold to the scheme-content dualism must make sense of conceptual relativism. It was then argued (see 2.4) that this was impossible. The unintelligibility of radical difference demonstrates that Davidson's alternative to the scheme-content dualism does not have to make conceptual relativism intelligible, which he argues is an impossible task. Moreover, our community of interpreters demonstrates another advantage of Davidson's alternative over the scheme-content dualism.

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[44] *ibid.*, p. 308.

The schemer had to make sense of the notion of uninterpreted content—a source of evidence which could not itself be evidence. This, Davidson argued, was impossible, and the reason why conceptual relativism was a impossible position. But what our interpreters share in common is not some uninterpreted content, but "the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."[45] These objects and the relations between them serve both as the truth conditions for sentences, and the objects of our beliefs. Interpreters largely agree on how the world is, i.e. since they interpret each other as having mostly true beliefs, and thus share by and large the same objects of belief. Their shared beliefs supply them with the common world in which they interpret one another. Again, they may differ over certain details, but it is the fact that they share a commitment generally to the familiar objects that their sentences and beliefs are about that allows this disagreement without demanding conceptual relativism and all its problems.

It seems that Davidson's alternative manages to avoid all the pitfalls of the scheme-content dualism highlighted in OVICS. By putting the very idea of a conceptual scheme behind him, Davidson's coherence theory of knowledge seems not (as is often claimed of coherence theories) to lose the world, but rather to offer it back to us by discarding the dogmatic Empiricism of Quine and the Positivists. But, as is often the case in philosophy, things are not as rosy as they might seem.

Back to the Omniscient Interpreter.

Much of what was claimed for Davidson's coherence theory in the last few paragraphs rested heavily on the omniscient interpreter argument, and its conclusion that "it becomes impossible to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are".[46] I will now argue that while it may be impossible for a radical interpreter to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are, it does *not* follow that it *is* impossible for someone to be mostly wrong about how things are.

The reason, again, why it is impossible to hold that anyone could be in massive error is that all interpreters, no matter how much or little they know, must interpret using the Principle of Charity. Thus there is no interpreter that could interpret someone as having mostly false beliefs. Thus no one can make intelligible the possibility that someone is mostly wrong about things. But leaving the omniscient interpreter aside for a moment, let us consider *how* the fallible interpreter makes sure that those he interprets are mostly in agreement with him.

As we have seen (3.3), all the evidence available to the radical interpreter is what sentences the speaker holds true, and the goings on in the environment inhabited

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[45]Davidson, OVICS, p. 198.

[46]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 317.

by the speaker. The interpreter does not know what the sentences held true by the speaker mean, nor does he know anything about the detailed contents of the speaker's beliefs. The process of interpretation involves investigation of conditions under which sentences are held true, and then mapping those sentences onto sentences in the home language which are held true under the same or similar circumstances. This last step is Davidson's famous method of holding belief constant in order to solve for meaning (i.e. the Principle of Charity). My claim is that there is nothing in this method that will block the possibility of misinterpretation. Thus, while no interpreter can make sense of there being someone with mostly false beliefs, this will not undermine the possibility that there are such people.

What allows an interpreter to take everyone as having mostly true beliefs by her lights is the fact that she is free to assign content to every speaker's beliefs as she sees fit, as long as the assignment agrees with the evidence of holding true. But this constraint is no constraint at all. For the interpreter can impose any relation between beliefs and objects in the world that she chooses on the interpreter, and the evidence for radical interpretation will not show her to be wrong. To demonstrate, let us return to Kurt's case.

Kurt is a German speaker who correctly takes 'es regnet' to mean 'it is raining'. However, he believes it is raining only when it is not. The interpreter who comes across Kurt will attribute belief to him about when it is raining as follows. She will observe that Kurt holds 'es regnet' true when and only when it is not raining. This she will take as evidence in support of the T-sentence

(T) 'es regnet' is true-in-German if and only if it is not raining.

Generalising, the interpreter could go on to attribute to Kurt mostly true beliefs (by her lights), while Kurt is in fact massively in error about how the world is. What allows all interpreters to find unintelligible the possibility of mostly false belief is that there is nothing in the method of interpretation that stops the interpreter mis-attributing beliefs to the speaker. If this is so, then while it is the case that a radical interpreter cannot make sense of the possibility of someone having mostly false beliefs, this does not undermine the possibility of someone having mostly false beliefs.

In defence of interpretation one might appeal to the community of interpreters (as discussed above), and in the case of Kurt, to our interpretations of other German speakers, but to no avail. Once Kurt's case is taken on board, it is no longer clear that interpreters share a common world containing the objects and events that make their sentences and beliefs true or false. Rather, it is possible that each interpreter holds to her own view of what makes her sentences and beliefs true or false, and imposes this

view on all others that she interprets. The sceptic will point out that she could of course be wrong, and even if she is not, this does not ensure that other are not massively wrong. And the schemer will point out that on Davidson's view of things reality may no longer be relative to scheme, but it is now relative to belief and not vice versa. What there is depends on what we believe, rather than what we believe depending on what there is.

So, the omniscient interpreter argument is correct in its conclusion that "[o]nce we agree to the general method of interpretation I have sketched, it becomes impossible correctly to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are."[47] However, the reason that Davidson's general method of interpretation has such a epistemologically significant conclusion is because it sets such overly generous limits on what is to serve as correct attribution of belief. Thus we discover, as Davidson did in his investigation of conceptual relativism, that "as so often in philosophy, it is hard to improve intelligibility while retaining the excitement."[48]

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[47]*ibid.*, p. 317.
[48]Davidson, OVICS, p. 183.

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